NEW

RELAX · UNWIND · BREATHE · REST · LAUGH

Calm & Clear

SET YOUR MIND FREE AND LEARN HOW TO BE YOU AGAIN

Inside!
EXPERT ADVICE
DO MORE OF THE THINGS YOU ENJOY

Sleep better

THE A-Z GUIDE OF BEDTIME HACKS

Manage stress & anxiety

SPOT THE SIGNS AND TAKE BACK CONTROL

Plus!

GOOD-MOOD FOODS & SIMPLE RECIPES

AVOID BURNOUT & START PUTTING YOURSELF FIRST

LIVE MORE IN THE MOMENT

Digital Edition

SIXTH EDITION

Meditate

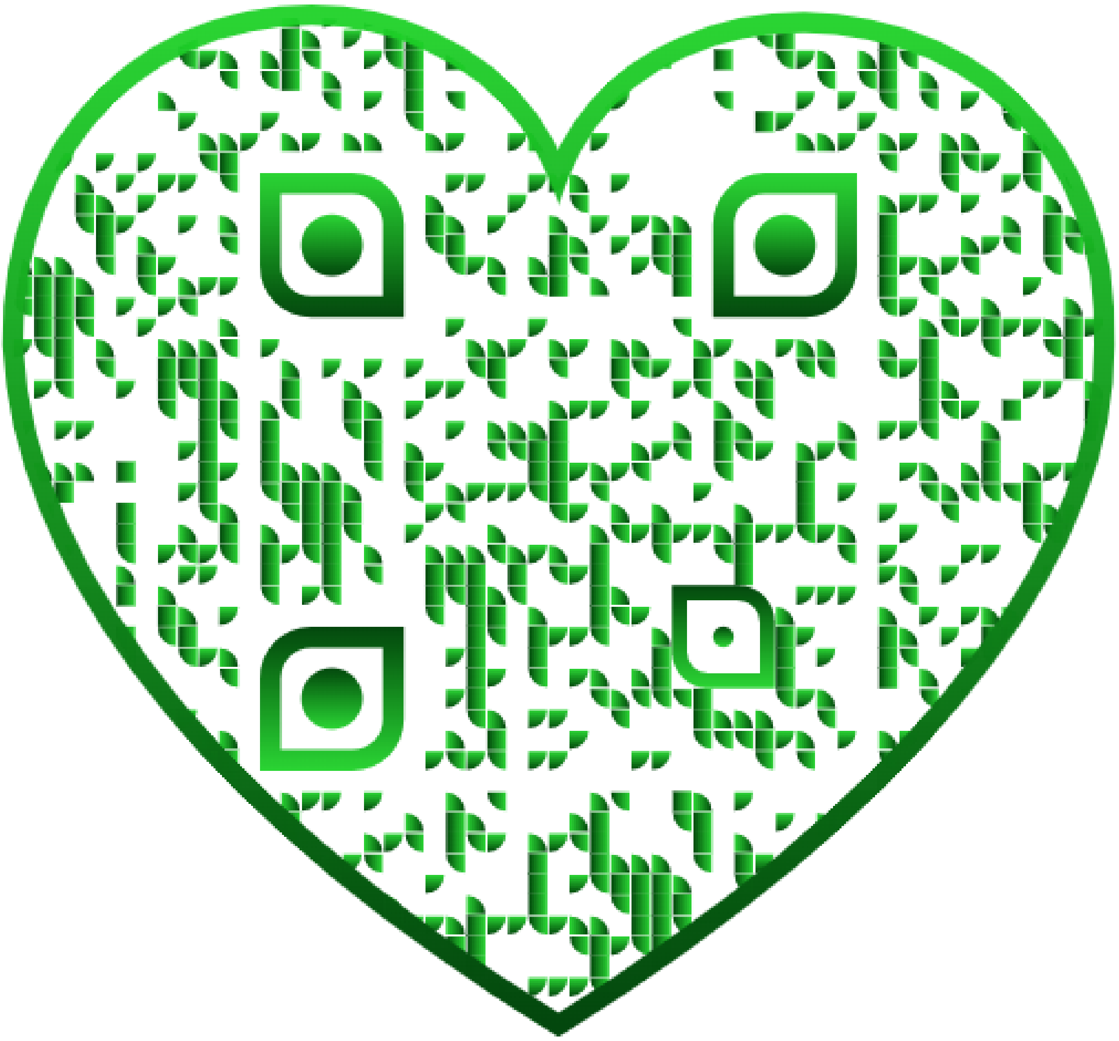
FIND YOUR MANTRA & BREATHE YOURSELF CALM

Talk more

EXPLORE THE BENEFITS OF CONFIDING IN FRIENDS

Do less

STOP PEOPLE-PLEASING & LEARN HOW TO SAY NO



Welcome to Calm & Clear

Life is full of ups and downs, highs and lows, celebrations and struggles. It's impossible to feel positive all of the time – even the most upbeat, 'zen' people have down days, or moments when they feel overwhelmed, anxious or stressed. The key to a calmer, clearer mindset is how we manage our thoughts and emotions. Calm & Clear is packed full of insightful articles and expert advice on how to take a step back, recognise how you're feeling, understand what's making you feel that way, and learn how to focus on your own needs to improve your mental wellbeing. We all have different mindsets, and our emotional baggage comes in various shapes and sizes, so what works for someone else might not work for you. Turn the page to explore the various methods you can try to get your sparkle back and learn how to cope with the stresses of everyday life. From addressing past demons and letting go of emotional burdens, to practising breathing exercises and embracing hobbies, equip yourself with the tools for a calmer, clearer future.

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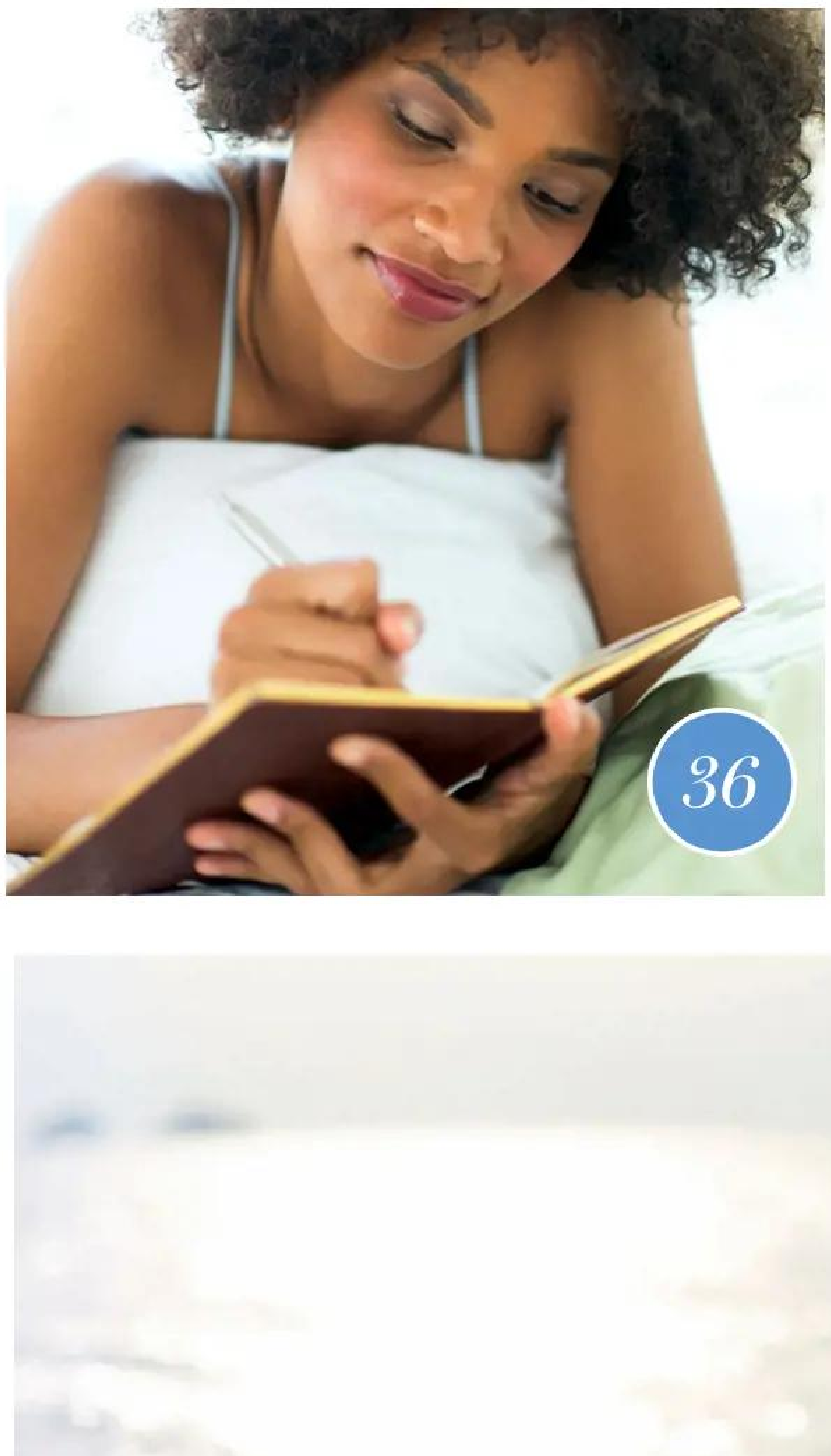

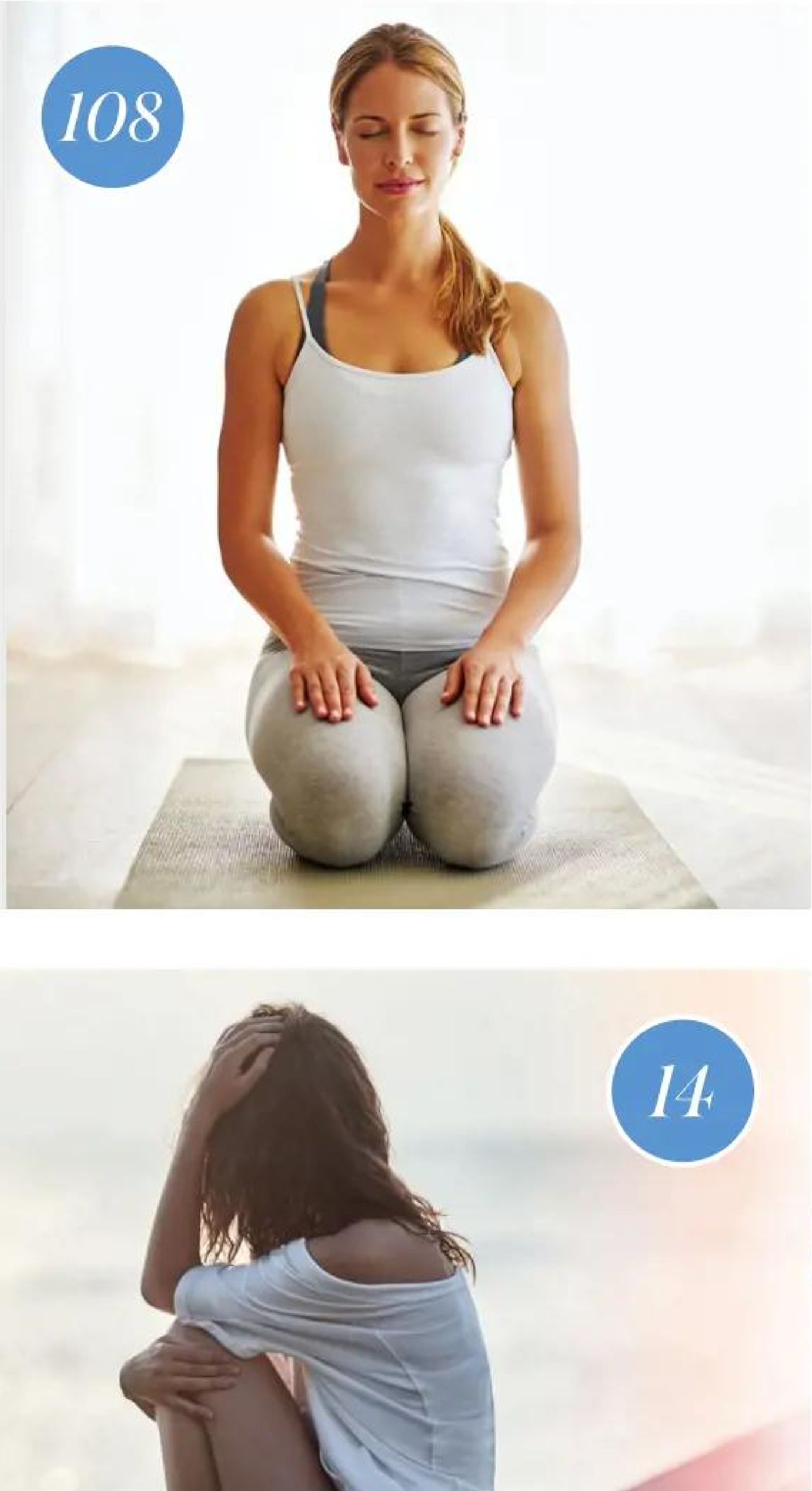

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FIND YOUR true self

Rediscover your individual identity for a happy and purposeful life

If you've ever asked the huge question of "Who am I?", you'll know it's not a simple thing to sum up. Our sense of self is a melting pot of qualities, values and personality traits that defines how we see, and feel, about ourselves. But why is this so important, and what happens when our inner state gets shaken?

Why identity matters

Psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson coined the term "identity crisis" in the late 1960s. He believed identity issues to be a developmentally important conflict faced by humans as they progress through life's stages, from childhood to old age.

Our sense of self is vital for emotional regulation and development ,and it enables us to navigate effectively in the world, explains psychotherapist Noel McDermott (noelmcdermott.net). 'We can think of it as the rudder on our boat that helps us to avoid rocks so that the boat doesn't get smashed.'

A good sense of self allows us to relate to ourselves comfortably and also underpins how we relate to others. 'We know that disconnection from others can cause someone to lose a sense of who they are, and in an extreme example, the ability of the mind to function will actually deteriorate if someone is in complete isolation for long periods of time,' says Noel.

> 'Go on a journey of self-development to get to know yourself and how you think'

Our identity also ebbs and flows depending on who you are surrounded by and what is happening in your life. 'Being comfortable with that change is essential – it's healthy that your self of sense is dynamic,' says Noel.

IDENTITY SOS

A crisis of self can be triggered by major life changes such as:

- **Beginning and endings of relationships**
- **Trauma**
- **Loss of a loved one**
- **Career changes or a new job**
- **Moving home**
- **Learning about a new health condition**

The fundamentals for developing a solid sense of self

- **Nurture your relationships** 'Maintaining strong, loving attachments to other people will give you a secure sense of self,' says Noel.
- **Boost your emotional IQ** Go on a journey of self-development to get to know yourself and how you think.
- **Practise meditation** 'Mindfulness allows you to develop an observer position to your feelings,' says Noel.

>>

✣ **Learn cognitive behavioural skills** CBT gives you a useful set of tools to understand the concept of "self".

✣ **Create a self checklist** During times of heightened change, it can be helpful to write down everything you are, eg "mother", "friend", "artist", "sister". 'This creates a narrative sense of self that can ease confusion,' says Noel.

Going solo?

Often, our identity is wrapped around our marriage or relationship, and it's not unusual to suffer a crisis of self following the breakdown of these partnerships. 'It can be common to lose yourself after separation, because couples become one during a long term relationship,' says breakup and divorce coach Sara Davison (saradavison.com). 'I see many women that are so entwined in their family life that when facing a future without their partner, kids or the routine of home life, they find themselves asking "Who even am I?". The silver lining of a break up however is that you get to rediscover your own identity again.'

✣ **Take time to heal**
Divorce, or the separation of two lives, is known as the second most traumatic life experience to go through, after the death of a loved one. 'It's inevitable that there will be trauma and upset, and it takes time to re-evaluate your life and think about who you want to be on your own,' says Sara. To avoid being overwhelmed by this huge shift, take small but positive steps that will help to move you forward.

✣ **It's okay to be selfish**
'It's important to take some time for yourself to do some self-discovery work. It will help you figure out the things that will make you smile and give you your sparkle back,' says Sara. 'You can re-create a life that you're even happier with than before, and you'll find it's probably much more self-focused. If you have been used to looking after other people for such a long time, this can feel selfish and uncomfortable, but that's all part of the process.'

✣ **Create a break-up bucket list**
You can now do all the things that you

FOUR WAYS TO FEEL GROUNDED

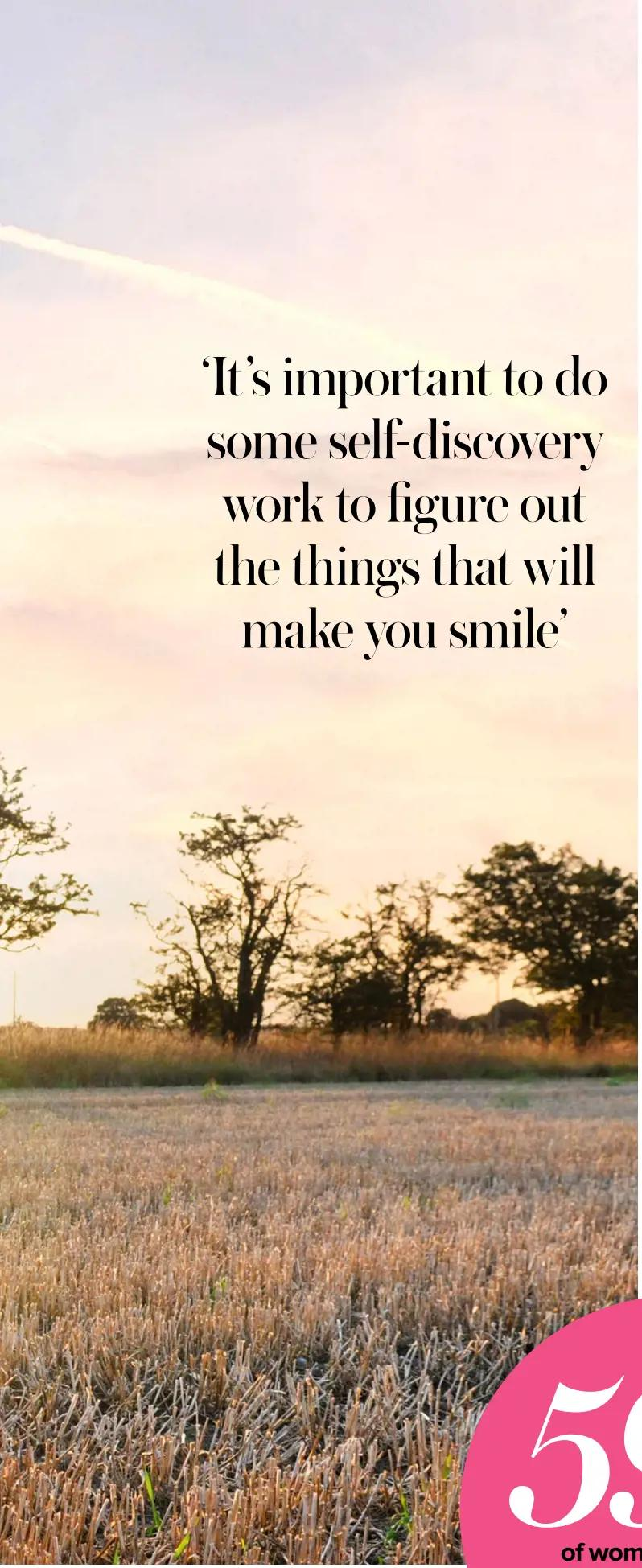
In times of uncertainty, steady yourself with Dr Shojaii's tips

1 Have a routine in place – this not only helps to manage expectations, but also provides structure to our lives.

2 Challenge any anxious thoughts – being able to confront negative thoughts that wander in our minds, and change our negative responses, provides us with an opportunity to develop a proactive approach to overcoming challenges.

3 Take a step back – when challenges occur and you're unsure what to do, take a step back and reassess the situation. By doing so, we can identify alternative solutions and increase our emotional awareness.

4 Practice emotional and physical wellbeing – eat well, sleep well, exercise and strengthen your self-compassion. This can be vital in helping us feel more in control of the physical and psychological aspects of our lives.



> 'It's important to do some self-discovery work to figure out the things that will make you smile'

weren't able to do in your relationship. 'This could be wearing leather trousers, climbing a mountain, going on a spontaneous girls' trip, or simply seeing friends that your partner never liked,' says Sara. 'You've jumped off the treadmill and have a golden opportunity to wipe the slate clean. Get out of the house and do things that you enjoy with people who make you feel good.'

Staying positive in a pandemic

A study revealed that one in two people in the UK felt down, depressed or hopeless about the future due to the COVID-19 crisis*. Lockdown changed the nation completely – leaving us to navigate the new normal with a sense of loss and unease. And as we've adjusted our individualism to fit with a more restricted way of life, it's no wonder many of us had a wobble. 'Feeling in control of our lives is an important factor in mental health and wellbeing,' says Dr Pegah Shojaii, a practitioner at Smart TMS. 'A sense of control can influence our behavioural responses, and enable us to feel less overwhelmed and more empowered about the future.'

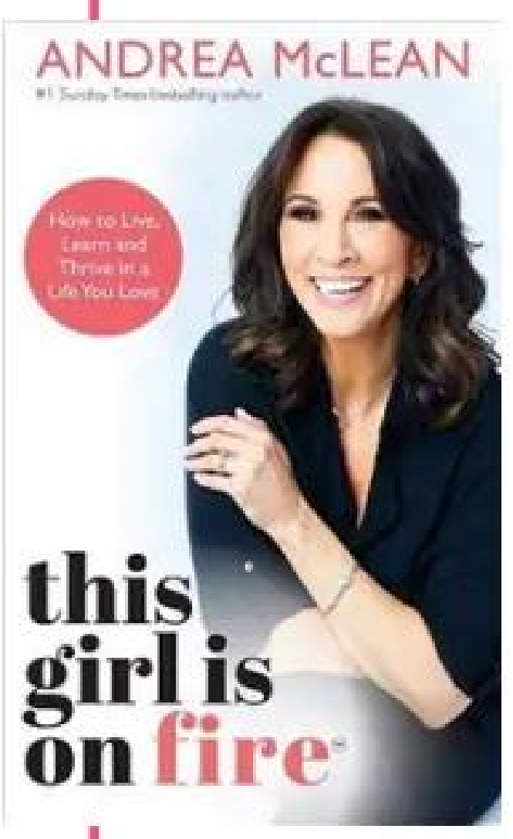
The comparison complex

How often do you measure yourself against others? Comparison helps us to explore and understand our position in life, but if we rely on it too much to define our worth, it weakens our identity – making us question our values and feel that we're not enough. In short, "keeping up with the Joneses" can jeopardise our happiness, and only serves to distract us from meeting our personal goals. 'From our comparison judgements, we develop beliefs about ourselves and others that lead to mindsets and behaviours that then govern our lives,' says Lucy Sheridan, life coach and author of *The Comparison Cure: How To Be Less 'Them' And More You* (Orion). 'It feels like being caught in a fog – unable to get out, with your view overwhelmingly affected.' So how do you free yourself from this toxic comparison trap? 'A fundamental part of this is gaining a deep understanding of what makes you tick, what drives you and what is ultimately at the core of your being,' says Lucy.

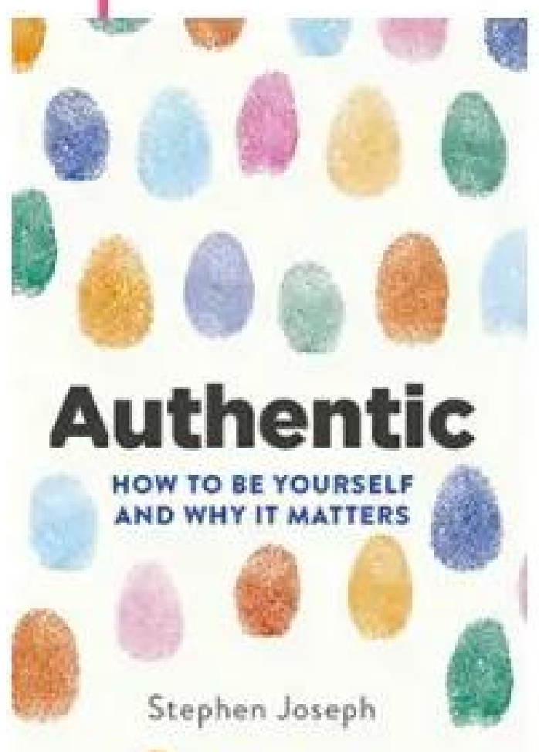
59%

of women reported having a midlife crisis in their 40s to 50s.**

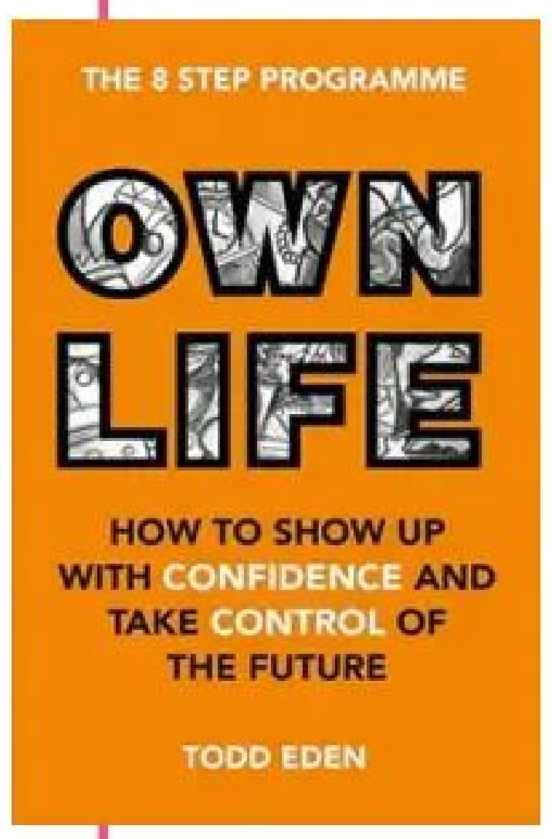
REDISCOVERY READS



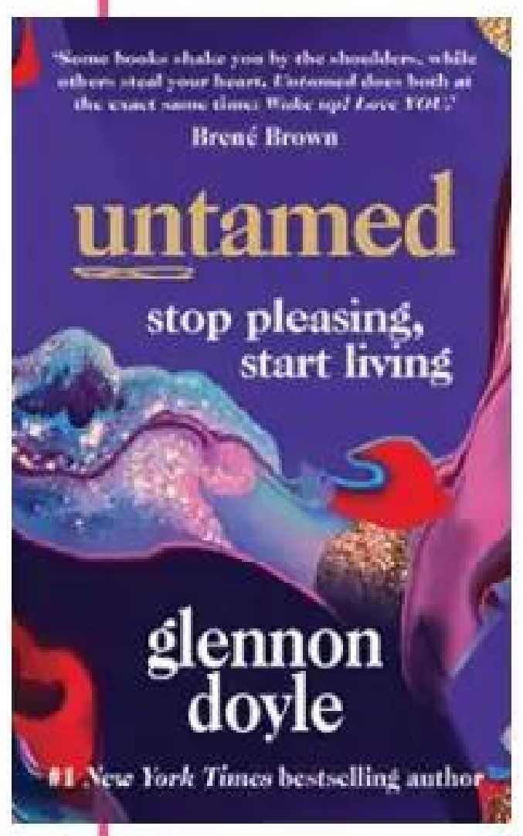
✣ ***This Girl Is On Fire,*** **by Andrea McLean (Hay House). Want to reshape your destiny? Let Andrea's story of self-discovery inspire you.**



✣ ***Authentic: How To Be Yourself And Why It Matters,*** **by Professor Stephen Joseph (Piatkus). Lessons to help you open the door to a more meaningful life.**


THE 8 STEP PROGRAMME
OWN LIFE
HOW TO SHOW UP WITH CONFIDENCE AND TAKE CONTROL OF THE FUTURE
TODD EDEN

✣ ***Own Life: How To Show Up With Confidence And Take Control Of The Future,*** **by Todd Eden (Amazon). Take control of your future with this practical guide.**



✣ ***Untamed: Stop Pleasing, Start Living,*** **by Glennon Doyle (Vermillion). A memoir to help you overcome conformity and live your best life.**

Cure status anxiety

Follow Lucy's advice for a comparison-free life:

✣ Signs of your self worth are all around you – take stock regularly.

✣ Remember that success is yours, and yours alone, to define.

✣ There is enough to go around for everyone – a win for someone else does not mean a loss for you.

✣ Stay checked-in with how you are showing up authentically.

WORDS: ALI HORSFALL. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): ALAMY, GETTY. *STUDY BY OPEN EVIDENCE, **STUDY BY INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BEHAVIOURAL DEVELOPMENT

Redesign YOUR LIFE

If you're craving a change or simply want to be happier, it's time to take matters into your own hands, explains Faith Hill

With the world evolving as quickly as it is today, it's become more feasible to make a life change – big or small – without upsetting the status quo.

Where once you were destined to stay in the same job, the same town, with the same partner and the same friends, doing the same pastimes, it's now easier – and more acceptable – to design your life as you want.

A life redesign can be as subtle or dramatic as you choose. Decisions like retraining for a new career or moving abroad are obviously major moves, but even a small shift can bring a much-needed breath of fresh air if something just doesn't feel right anymore. These steps will help you to identify and activate your own life redesign.

OUR EXPERTS

Bill Burnett and **Dave Evans** are the authors of *Designing Your Life* (Vintage), and run a Life Design course at Stanford University.

Miisa Mink is the founder of DrivenWoman, a platform where women support one another.

1 Get started

Let go of any limiting beliefs that have held you back in the past. Negative thoughts, such as 'I don't deserve this' or 'I don't have the confidence' will stop you at the first hurdle.

DO IT Positive self-talk really does work wonders. Saying 'I choose to make this happen' or 'I know no limits' will improve your self-belief. The brain believes what you tell it the most often.

2 The right resources

What or who do you need to make your life redesign happen? Perhaps you need experience in a certain work field; where can you take a course?

'When you let go of your pride and start sharing your ambitions with others, you open yourself up to a higher level of self-awareness,' explains Miisa Mink. 'As soon as you announce your ideas, even if it's just to one person, there's an urgency to make them happen.'

DO IT Make today the day you take action. If it's a person you need help from, reach out to them. If it's a skill or asset you need, dedicate 20 minutes to research how you can obtain it.

3 Identify your values

Knowing your true values – what is most important to you – will help you see which life areas need more of your attention. 'A well-designed life is one that makes sense,' say Bill Burnett and Dave Evans. 'It's a life in which who you are, what you believe and what you do, all line up together.'

DO IT Dive deep into your thoughts and habits. Ask yourself the following questions and write down the answers. How do you spend your time, energy and money? What dominates your positive thoughts? What do you most often think about or talk about with others? What inspires you? What goals stand out in your life and have stood the test of time? What topics do you love to study, read about or research?

You should find some key themes emerging – the three most frequent responses are considered your top values. For example, these could be your relationship with your partner, having a calm home environment, and having valuable me-time. Your close female friendships or how you work together with your community may feature, or perhaps treasured holidays overseas.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/TETRA IMAGES RF

4 Step into your power

It can be easy to lose sight of all your strengths and successes, but now is the time to remind yourself how amazing you are.

DO IT Write three lists: 1 Your personal and professional achievements. 2 What you're good at. 3 Your strengths or positive traits. If you're feeling stuck or shy about blowing your own trumpet, ask a friend or loved one to contribute.

5 Own it!

You deserve the very best life. Allow yourself to feel stronger by making your choices, and acknowledging the fact that you are in control of making them happen. Go forwards with the confidence you have – or are on the way to getting. It's what you need to make your life redesign happen.

DO IT Maintain your enthusiasm and momentum by reminding yourself daily of the reasons why this area of your life is important to you.

6 Choose a target

Is one of your top three values lacking in some way? Maybe you put high value on having time with friends but you don't see them as much as you'd like to. Or you want to earn money but you don't enjoy the work you do any more.

To make your life redesign a desirable target, look at the rationale behind your top values. For example, you may want to ask your employer if you can work from home two days a week. This extra time may increase your overall happiness and reduce your stress levels. Or perhaps you would like to find a partner and want to try dating apps; knowing that this will improve your self-confidence will spur you on, even in moments of doubt.

DO IT Write a list of reasons why this part of your life is so important to you and what positive aspects it brings.

+ Faith Hill is a life coach specialising in life redesign. Visit sparkescapes.com.

Tired of FAKING IT?

Sometimes pretending you're okay when deep down you're really not can actually be the best option. We explore when to plaster on that smile and when to fess up...

We all have our ups and downs, and most of us have been guilty of smiling on through and pretending all is fine from time to time when we're actually not. But is it better to be honest and open about how we're feeling? Or, are there benefits in projecting positivity even if we feel anything but?

Feeling blue vs feeling depressed

We've probably all had a few days of feeling below par. But it's important to recognise if your low mood is more than just a passing dose of the blues. Even if you've felt down in the past and managed to overcome it without support, it's important to recognise the times when you need help.

So how to differentiate between a normal "low" and clinical depression? According to Dr Jo Gee, psychotherapist and co-founder of The Luna Hive, the key is to recognise when the way you feel interferes with your everyday activities. 'Clinical symptoms of depression include changes in appetite or sleep, difficulty in getting up in the morning, or problems with concentration,' she explains. 'If you notice any of these signs or if the way you feel is interfering with your daily functioning, it's important to seek professional help.'

Are you being honest?

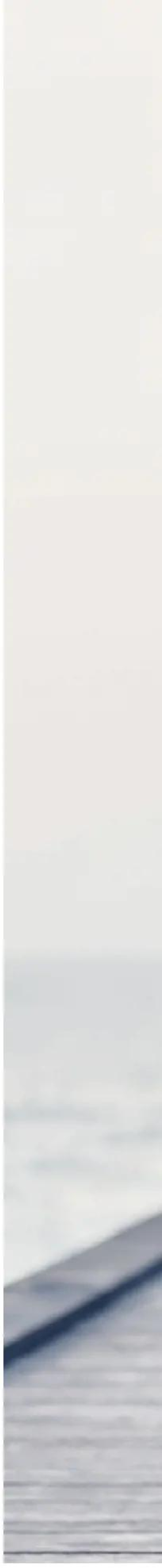
Wearing a smile and putting on a positive face to the world can sometimes be helpful – lifting our spirits or enabling us to function at work or at a social occasion despite going through a low point.

However, it's important to remain honest with ourselves and understand why we're acting as we are. Putting on a front is one thing, but accepting how we feel within ourselves is crucial.

'If we're hiding how we feel from others, it may be because we don't want to share our feelings with that particular person,' explains Gee. 'But being in denial and hiding it from ourselves can mean that negative thoughts churn away while we're on autopilot – this can often make things worse.'

Can faking it help?

As long as we acknowledge how we feel personally, there is some mileage in the saying "fake it 'til you make it!". Sometimes, acting positively in both our



words and actions can actually create physiological change.

'There's lots of evidence that shows being positive and not giving in to our depressive symptoms can help to combat low mood,' explains Gee. 'So getting up in the morning, even though clinical depression can make you want to stay in bed; fighting that fatigue with exercise and even changing our facial expression to a smile, can all help. The body is very clever and biofeedback has shown that if we smile when we're feeling low it can actually change our emotions for the better.'

Gee recommends using the phrase "activation before motivation" in this situation. 'Rather than waiting for the motivation to come, act – do that run, go to that class, see your friends – and motivation will come back as our mood lifts,' she explains.

Opening up

While faking a smile might be helpful in some situations, it's also important to share the load with someone you trust if you're feeling down. This might mean opening up to a friend, family member or professional therapist.

'Usually, we know instinctively whether we can confide in someone,' explains Dr Tina Mistry, clinical psychologist from Therapy Sense. 'We need to choose someone safe, whom we can trust.'

Whoever we choose, opening up about how we are feeling can be a useful tool in finding a way forward.

'Talking can be very helpful in working out what's going wrong – sometimes people will come to therapy and say they have no reason for feeling as they do – it's one of the things that scares people the most,' explains Gee.

'But if you talk about your situation, you might come to realise that pressure at work, or a situation in your personal life has contributed to how you feel. Sharing helps us to explore and use someone else's eyes to think over the problem.'

Give yourself a break

When we're feeling down, particularly if we also suffer from low self-esteem, it can be difficult to look after ourselves properly. But being kind to yourself not only makes life a little more palatable, it also sends a powerful message to your subconscious – that you're worth it!

Whether it's making sure you eat well, treating yourself to an evening out or simply giving yourself a break, a little kindness can go a long way to helping us to get back on track.

It's also important not to take any perceived failures to heart. Nobody can meet all of their objectives all of the time – and minor setbacks are to be expected.

Small steps, bigger picture

We'd all love to find a quick fix – a way to effortlessly turn our negative feelings into positive ones in one move. Unfortunately, the route back from depression is often comprised of many small steps rather than a giant leap.

But remembering the bigger picture – what you value and where you'd like to be – is essential when taking steps in the right direction.

'When we start to think about the bigger picture, we are often more determined to do something,' explains Mistry. 'Ask yourself what you value, and what you feel is best for you. At the same time, choose to do things that will replenish rather than deplete your energies; and be gentle with yourself.'

Friends and family

Human beings are great actors – and many find it easy to disguise how they're feeling when they are low. So even if someone close to you is feeling depressed, you may not notice any particular signs. However, there are some giveaways that could set alarm bells ringing.

'The main way we spot depression in others is through behavioural changes,'

Seeking professional support

Many believe professional support – available from your doctor and other healthcare providers – should only be sought out when an individual is suffering from more extreme symptoms.

However, it's important to remember that seeking professional help doesn't have to be a last resort – in fact, the right intervention at the right moment can mean a quicker resolution of your symptoms. 'Often in therapy, we see people who have hit rock bottom,' agrees Gee. 'But intervening more quickly may help to minimise your depression or prevent it from getting worse.'

'People who struggle with depression and low mood often find it difficult to talk to others, as the ideas they hold about themselves – that they're not worth it, or that they shouldn't bother anyone else – can get in the way,' adds Mistry. 'The aim of therapy is to create that safe space where you can explore and expose your vulnerability without feeling judged, ashamed or mishandled.'

If you would like to explore treatment options, it's worth talking this over with your doctor – they will be in the best position to refer you for local support or advise you on the next steps. Alternatively, you could seek out a local therapist – making sure you check their qualifications, credentials and experience.

explains Gee. 'If we notice a friend or family member is avoiding certain situations, if they don't seem as sociable as usual or they've lost interest in daily activities, these could be signs that they are depressed. In addition, they might seem irritable, have changes in concentration or difficulty getting up in the morning.'

Helping others to talk

Let's face it, most of us can't simply walk up to someone and ask them if they're depressed – and if we did, chances are the answer wouldn't be the truth. A more subtle approach is needed. Make sure that the way you ask matches the personality of your friend, but Gee says that most of the time, starting with yourself is a great way to encourage others to open up.

'If you're worried about someone, perhaps start with a comment on how you're feeling yourself,' she suggests. 'For example, say "wow, it's been really hard this month, hasn't it? How are you doing?" to encourage them to share.'

Beating the blues

As well as seeking professional advice and confiding in others, there are loads of different ways we can beat or protect ourselves against low mood.

✢ **MINDFULNESS**

This is a practice that encourages us to become aware of our thoughts and manage them more effectively. 'NICE recommend it for a huge range of conditions, and it has been shown to be an effective treatment for recurrent depression,' says Gee.

Many therapists now use mindfulness as part of their practice. Or, if you'd rather explore mindfulness techniques at home, Be Mindful is an NHS-recommended online course (**bemindful.co.uk**) that uses mindfulness-based cognitive behavioural therapy to help you to understand and improve your mindset. Two apps that can be helpful are Headspace and Calm.

✢ **EXERCISE**

It can be hard to motivate ourselves to exercise at the best of times, but forcing ourselves off the sofa – for a walk, a jog or an aerobics class – can benefit our mood. 'Exercise perpetuates our dopamine levels, which will help to improve our mood,' explains Gee.

✢ **GETTING OUTSIDE**

This has also been shown to be very helpful in lifting our mood. Exposure to sunlight can also top up vitamin D levels – deficiencies are linked to depressive symptoms.

✢ **BREATHING**

During times of stress and panic, our breathing can become disrupted, leading to exacerbation of symptoms. Simple breathing exercises can help us to find calm within the storm.

✢ **POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS**

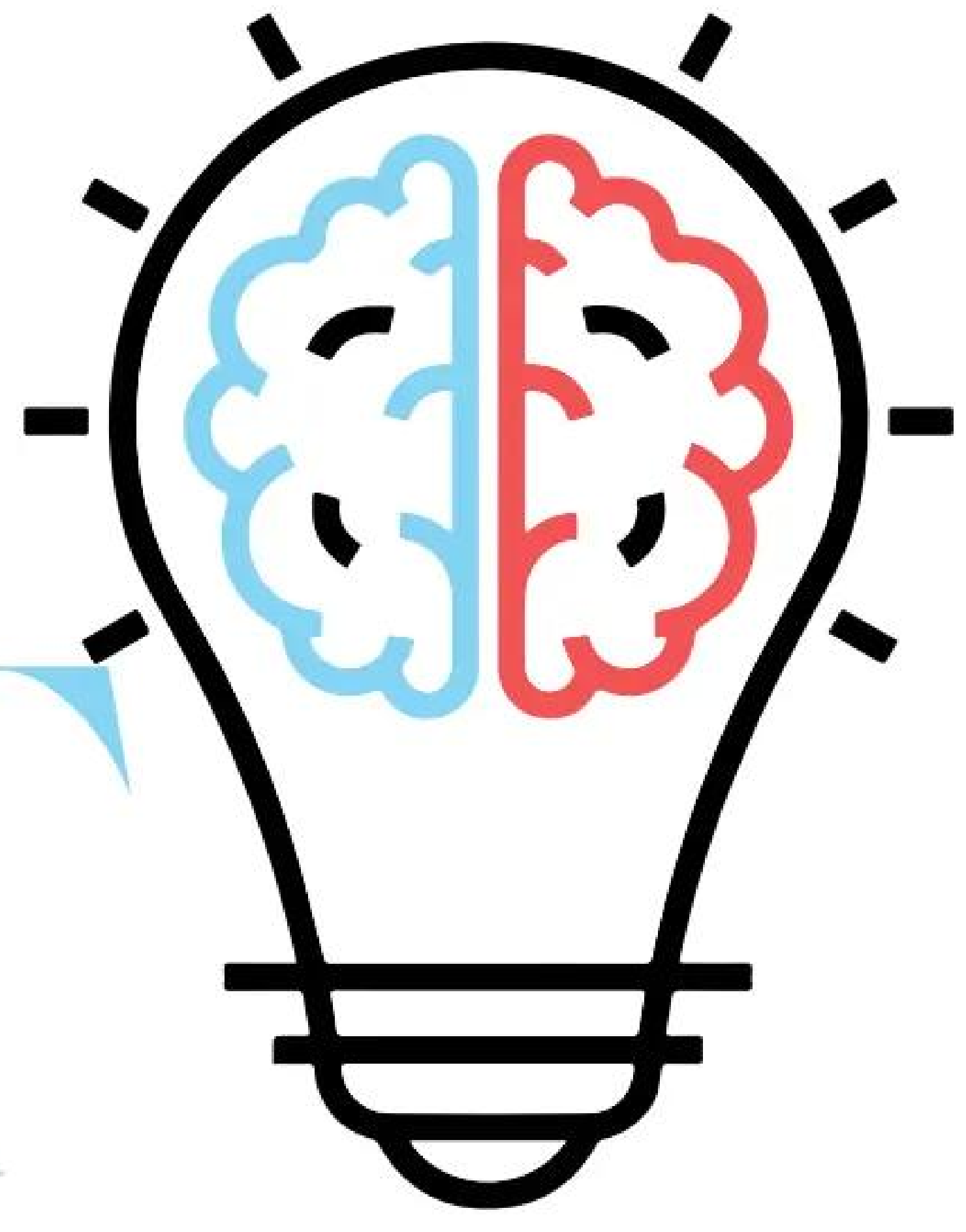
Having pick-me-ups to say to ourselves when we're having a tough time can be useful. 'Key phrases such as "you can manage" or "this will pass" can be really effective,' explains Gee.

✢ **TRACKING YOUR PROGRESS**

Some people may benefit from using a mood tracker, which can help you to see that although you don't feel your best, you are making progress. The Be Mindful course lets you rate your mood, helping you to see progress and identify where you are struggling.

WORDS: GILLIAN HARVEY. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES, GETTY IMAGES/EYEEM, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Mood for THOUGHT



Emotions all over the place? Try these tips to put a smile on your face

MOOD MIXERS

Even the smallest thing can knock us off balance...

1 Food intolerances

Yes, you really are what you eat. What's on your plate can not only upset your gut, causing nausea and abdominal pain, but also how you feel, causing irritability, mood swings, lack of focus, aggression, nervousness or hyperactivity.

SORT IT Avoid eating food packed with sugar, nitrates, colouring, preservatives and additives.

2 Your home

It's supposed to be your sanctuary, but your latest home improvement could actually put you in a bad mood. Arguing about the colour of paint is the most hotly debated DIY topic – and there's a good reason why. Picking the wrong colour can wreak havoc. In particular, red can make you feel irritable, angry and hostile.

SORT IT Choose yellows to trigger happiness or blues to aid relaxation.

3 Your bedside lamp

Regularly fall asleep reading or watching TV? While it may seem to relax you before you hit the hay, it could have negative repercussions the next day. Research has shown that night-time light can suppress the production of mood-regulating hormone melatonin, which is only produced in darkness.

SORT IT Buy heavy curtains or blackout blinds, turn off all lights at night and leave your phone outside the bedroom.

4 To-do lists

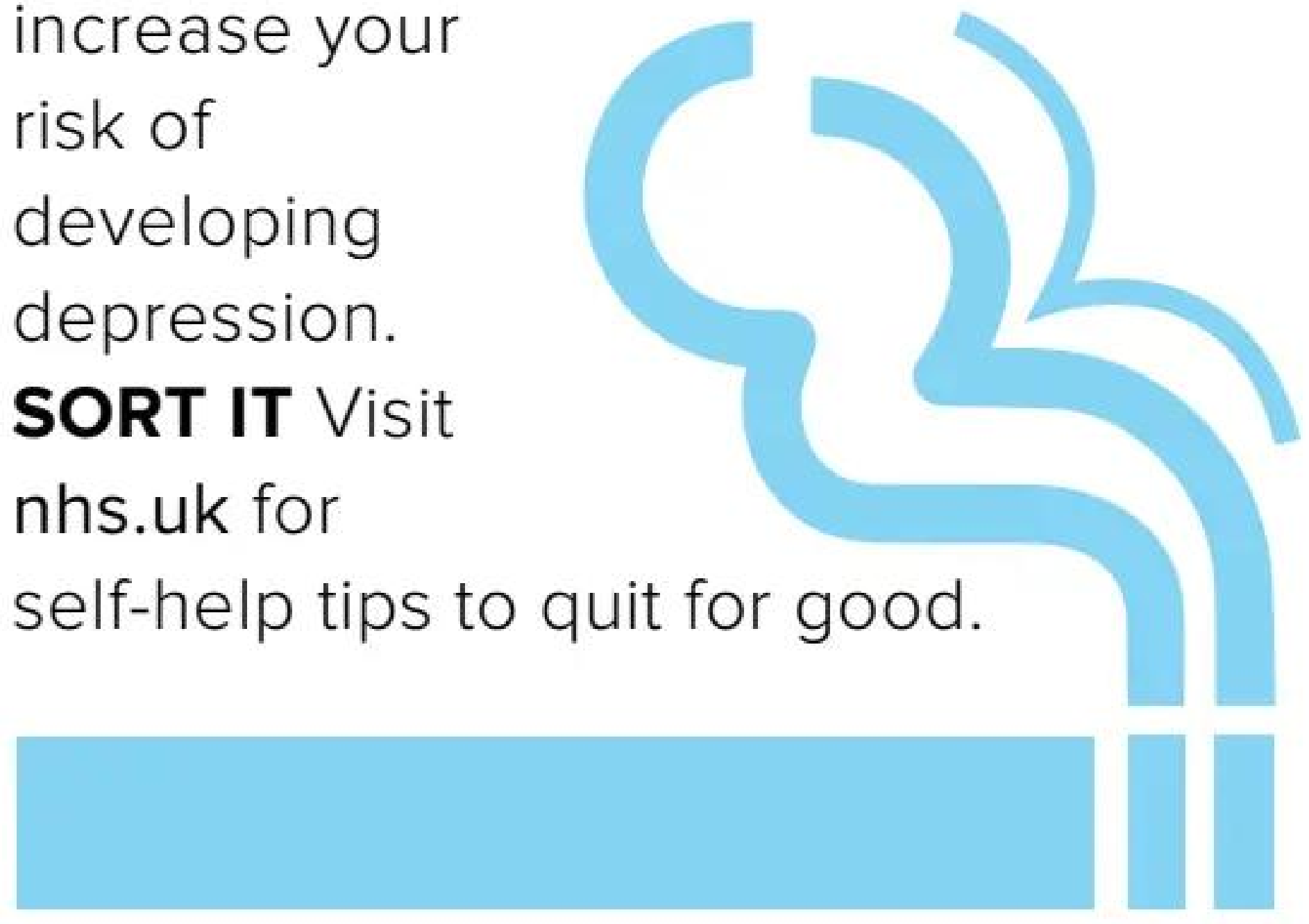
Although they should help you feel more in control, they can in fact make you feel more overwhelmed than organised. This is due to something call the Zeigarnik effect, which causes us to fixate on the items we didn't get to, rather than the jobs that we ticked off.

SORT IT Try making an "It's-done" list at the end of the day instead. You'll get the gratification without the guilt.

5 Smoking

As if you need another reason not to light up. Apart from causing cancer, heart disease and premature ageing, it can also affect your mental health. According to New Zealand researchers, it could increase your risk of developing depression.

SORT IT Visit nhs.uk for self-help tips to quit for good.



11%

Who thought Facebook could be good for you? Well,according to researchers at the UK's Open University, looking through photos is more of a pick-me-up than TV or chocolate, which only lifted the mood for 1% of people studied.

Turn it up

Psychologists at McGill University in Canada have found that neurochemical benefits of music can improve your immune system, reduce anxiety and help regulate mood. Why not join a choir? A study has found that singing in a group can increase your sense of social connection, boost your brain and enhance your mood.

93%

That's how many people work out because it makes them happy, according to the Australian Fitness Expo survey. Exercising releases endorphins and increases mood-regulating serotonin.

Get appy

Master your mind with these free downloads

HAPPIFY (IOS, ANDROID) This app will help you combat negative thoughts. Select an option to best meet your needs – whether it's finding more me-time or handling stress.

MINDSHIFT (IOS, ANDROID) This stress-management tool helps you figure out what's upsetting you, via on-screen prompts. It also encourages you to try new ways of taking charge of your anxiety.

TALKSPACE (IOS, ANDROID) Something on your mind? Answer a questionnaire and you'll be partnered with a licensed therapist in a private chatroom, who can help you let off steam.

7PM

Thanks to landing just after work and before dinner ends the day, this is considered the happiest time.*

*According to researchers at the University of California, Riverside.

Book a treat

The lead-up to a holiday or theatre visit can improve happiness as much as the event itself. A study at Erasmus University Rotterdam found that the weeks leading up to a holiday could give you more positive feelings than its afterglow.

Buy it!

The Positive Planner, £24 ($32), notonthehighstreet.com is a 12-week planner and journal dedicated to self-care, featuring inspirational quotes, art therapy and mindfulness activities.

THE POSITIVE PLANNER

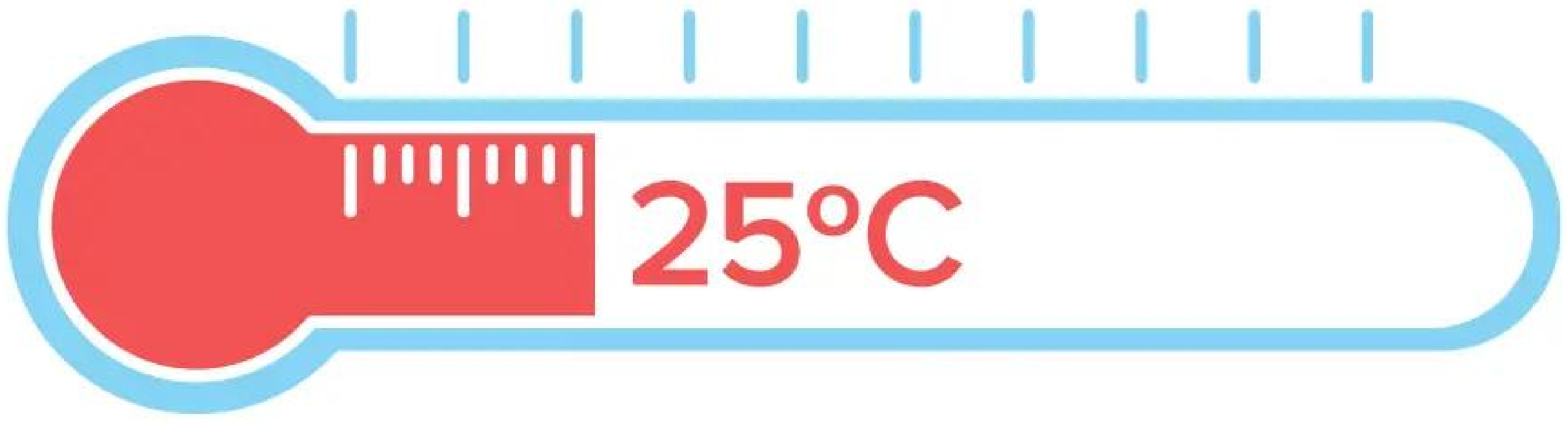
FEELGOOD FOODS

Nutritionist Cassandra Barns reveals her top picks...

GREEN TEA It contains L-theanine, which has been found to have a relaxing effect on your mind, reducing anxiety while improving focus and concentration.

SPINACH It's a great source of magnesium and calcium – which help calm the nervous system.

PUMPKIN SEEDS Packed with calming magnesium and zinc, they keep blood sugar stable, preventing the peaks and dips that can trigger the release of stress hormones that play havoc with mood and energy.



The ideal room temperature to put you in a good mood.

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10 MOOD-LIFTING NUTRIENTS »Calcium »Chromium »Folate »Iron »Magnesium »Omega-3 fatty acids »Vitamin B6 »Vitamin B12 »Vitamin D »Zinc

Words Natalia Lubomirski **Photos** Getty Images, Alamy

Feeling BLUE?

If the winter months leave you low, it could mean you're experiencing seasonal affective disorder...

Dread the dark nights and cold days? You're not the only one – it's normal to feel affected by the changing seasons. In fact, 57% of Britons experience low mood at this time of year compared to during the summer*. But if the onset of winter seems to be seriously impacting your life each year, then it could be seasonal affective disorder (also known as SAD). 'As the days start getting noticeably shorter, some people find their mood becomes subdued,' says LloydsPharmacy pharmacist Pareena Patel. 'SAD is a type of depression that's related to changes in seasons, which tends to start in the autumn and then becomes worse during December, January and February.' Here's what to watch out for, and how to beat it...

It's linked to our geography

SAD is most common in countries like the UK where there are large changes in the weather and daylight hours in the different seasons. 'Research has shown that those living farthest from the equator in northern latitudes have a higher susceptibility to SAD than their southern counterparts,' explains Dr Meg Arroll, chartered psychologist on behalf of Healthspan. 'For example, in the United States only 1% of people who live in Florida experience SAD compared to 9% of Alaskans.'

Not feeling like yourself?

'A drop in mood isn't the only sign of SAD,' says Pareena. 'You may also be less active than normal and find you don't have as much energy. You may have problems sleeping or feel the need to sleep a lot more than usual. Anxiety, panic attacks, stress, poor appetite, overeating, weight gain, frequent colds and loss of sex drive are all symptoms too.' Plus, look out for a reluctance to socialise, difficulties in concentration and comfort-food cravings.

Why sunlight is so important

It's generally believed SAD is caused by the lack of daylight during winter months affecting the production of serotonin in our brains.

'The disruption of melatonin and serotonin affects our sleep/wake cycle (circadian rhythm) and mood,' says Dr Arroll. 'A Danish study demonstrated that people who work outdoors are somewhat protected from wintertime SAD.'

Who's at risk?

Like many conditions, some people will be more predisposed to SAD than others. 'Over half of individuals who experience SAD will

YOUR SAD HANDBOOK

These five easy-to-grasp tips can help you reset the balance when seasonal sadness strikes…

1 **DON'T PILE PRESSURE ON** 'Taking on too much will make you feel stressed and run down, so don't overstretch yourself,' says Mark Pinches, head of coaching at Westfield Health. 'To help order your thoughts and stay productive, break down larger tasks into smaller ones and prioritise their importance.'

2 **EAT RIGHT** 'The winter leaves many of us craving starchy carbohydrates and, while these are a vital part of any diet, it's important to strike a balance,' says Dr Ramlakhan. 'If you need a snack, fill up on foods like walnuts, bananas and tomatoes – they all help your body to produce serotonin. Diet also plays a significant role in the quality of sleep we have so it's best to avoid having a heavy meal before bedtime. If you often wake up in the night feeling hungry, then try having a little snack before bedtime.'

3 **GET ENOUGH REST** 'In the run-up to Christmas you're likely to be socialising more and sleeping less but, if you're burning the candle at both ends, you're bound to be tired,' says Mark. 'Getting a good night's sleep is the only way you can properly recharge your batteries, having a combination of quantity and quality.'

4 **TAKE A BREAK** 'Working long days once the clocks have gone back will mean there's not much time left during the evening for "you time",' explains Mark. 'Take a break during this period to recharge. Be careful not to use all your annual leave in the summer – make sure you save a few days to take in the run-up to Christmas to get organised or simply do nothing.'

5 **BE TECH SMART** 'Information overload and constant connection can negatively impact your mood,' says Dr Ramlakhan. 'While it might be tempting to cuddle up with your iPad this winter, make sure you allow your brain to switch off in the evenings. Avoid social media accounts and emails for 90 minutes before bedtime. Instead, read a book, listen to relaxing music and have a bath using relaxing essential oils.'

NEED TO KNOW

- **✢ MELATONIN A hormone produced in the brain, which helps control the sleep/wake cycle.**
- **✢ SEROTONIN A type of chemical that helps relay messages between nerve cells, an imbalance of which may lead to depression.**

Will I get it every year?

'If you haven't made any changes to your lifestyle, such as spending more time outdoors, it's likely that SAD can reoccur,' says Dr Arroll. 'However, research suggests that it is less likely to occur in older people.'

have a close family member with depression, suggesting a genetic or environmental link,' says Dr Arroll. 'Some studies have reported the condition to be four times more prevalent in women. However, that may be because women tend to seek out help for all types of mental health issues more readily than men.'

When to see your GP

'When spring arrives, most people who are affected find their symptoms start to improve and eventually disappear altogether,' says Pareena. But, if you're finding it difficult to maintain your usual everyday activities or, if you're finding it hard to cope with any of the symptoms, you should see your GP.

Getting outdoors is key

Due to the powerful effect sunlight can have on our health, walking outdoors each day is a great way to reduce your risk. 'Exposure to sunlight increases the brain's release of the happy hormone serotonin,' says Silentnight's sleep expert Dr Nerina Ramlakhan. 'Even just half an hour will make a difference. Exercising outside will kill two birds with one stone – you'll get as much light as possible and help to reset the body's circadian rhythm.'

Get talking

Psychological therapies, such as psychotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and counselling can be a good way to cope with symptoms, and can also help you recognise and deal with other factors that may be affecting how you feel. 'CBT has been shown in numerous research studies to improve mood, energy and motivation by allowing people to see how their thoughts and feelings influence their behaviour,' says Dr Arroll. 'CBT is also a good way to manage stress. Mindfulness, relaxation and breathing techniques can also boost energy and mood.' Your GP should be able to give you information about talk treatments and refer you to your local practitioner.

Could antidepressants be the answer?

'If appropriate, your GP may offer antidepressants in some cases,' says Dr Arroll. They won't "cure" the condition, but can help with symptoms. They need to be taken for around two to six weeks before becoming effective. And they're not recommended for mild or moderate cases of SAD.

DOES LIGHT THERAPY REALLY WORK?

If part of the problem with SAD is that we're not getting enough sunlight, can a SAD lamp help? 'Many people use light or phototherapy which mimics natural daylight,' says Dr Arroll. 'The theory is that this will trick your brain into producing appropriate levels of melatonin and serotonin, thus maintaining a balanced circadian rhythm. Some studies suggest that light therapy is beneficial in 85% of people with SAD. For most people, continual use of light therapy products is needed throughout the darker months, and products now come as everyday items, such as desk lamps to provide an unobtrusive option. Dawn simulators may help too as they provide a more natural start to the day.' Try Lumie Vitamin L, John Lewis & Partners). The warm light creates a UV-free "sunshine" effect to boost mood in 30 minutes.

HERBAL HEALERS

Grass & Co.
EASE
CBD OIL BLEND
CBD
TURMERIC
GINGER
ORANGE

✢ **Ease CBD Oil Blend (grassandco.com)** enhances the effects of natural brain chemicals such as serotonin, and helps to reduce restlessness and fatigue.

healthspan
Super Strength
Vitamin D3

✢ **Super Strength Vitamin D3 (healthspan.co.uk).** Low levels of vitamin D, the "sunshine vitamin" have been associated with SAD. 'You can get some vitamin D from foods, such as eggs, oily fish, mushrooms and fortified foods – however, if you've experienced SAD in the past, it would be worth taking a supplement,' says Dr Arroll.

link
NUTRITION
MUSHROOM PLUS
60 CAPSULES
FOOD SUPPLEMENT

✢ **Mushroom Plus (linknutrition.com)** can help regulate energy and fatigue, providing an energy boost.

A.Vogel
Hyperiforce
St John's Wort tablets
60 tablets

✢ **Hyperiforce St John's Wort Tablets (avogel.co.uk).** 'Studies have shown this can be helpful in relieving symptoms of SAD ,' says Dr Chris Etheridge, chair of the British Herbal Medicine Association.

higher nature
SEROTONE 5HTP
50mg
ULTIMATE NUTRITION
FOOD SUPPLEMENT

✢ **Serotone 5HTP (highernature.com),** contains the amino acid tryptophan, which converts into serotonin, to help to tackle low mood all year round.

Please note some natural supplements can interfere with prescription medication including contraception so if you are concerned, check with your doctor before you start taking them.

*THE WEATHER CHANNEL AND YOUGOV. WORDS: FAYE M SMITH. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

AM I JUST FEELING DOWN?

In the UK, around 6% of people have SAD but, for a formal diagnosis, you will have to experience symptoms for two consecutive years, so your doctor can see if your depression is linked to the seasons. This means you'll spend around 40% of the year feeling low, with a noticeable change when the weather improves again. 'If your symptoms have an obvious pattern, then you may be experiencing SAD,' says Dr Arroll. But any low mood, regardless of what type of depression it is, is worth discussing with your doctor, especially if you feel you can't cope. 'They can help make sure your low mood is not related to anything else obvious, such as family tensions at Christmas,' says Dr Arroll. 'The pressure of the festive season can certainly cause a great deal of stress but it's not normal to feel severely depressed at this, or any, time of year.'

74%
of Brits find Christmas stressful, with the pressure of delivering the "perfect" Christmas as a leading cause, says a study by Bupa.

Look forward, not back

Plus, with New Year on the horizon, it's easy to look back and wallow in winter. 'As Christmas is at the end of the chronological year, people tend to look back on what they have achieved and what they haven't,' says Dr Natasha Bijlani, consultant psychiatrist at Priory Hospital Roehampton. 'If you're suffering with depression or low self-esteem, there is a real risk that any negative feelings of under-achievement, or the past year not living up to your expectations, are exacerbated. Focus on the positives and set goals you want to achieve in the following year.'

WHERE TO GET HELP

Feeling isolated? These organisations can offer advice and support...

- **MIND (mind.org.uk)**
- **RETHINK MENTAL ILLNESS (rethink.org)**
- **SAMARITANS (samaritans.org)**

Sunshine suppers

BOOST YOUR VITAMIN D

Darker days mean fewer hours to get your vitamin D, vital for warding off depression. These dishes will help!

Tikka salmon with spicy rice pilaf

PER SERVING
476 cals; 16g fat; 2.5g sat fat; 47g carbs

We all need to eat oily fish – and here's a new way with salmon.

SERVES 4
- **150g (5oz) Total 0% yogurt**
- **1tbsp tikka paste**
- **4 small skinless salmon fillets**
- **Lime wedges, to serve**

For the rice
- **Few squirts olive oil spray**
- **2 onions, 1 finely chopped, 1 finely sliced**
- **1 red pepper, finely diced**
- **1tsp each cumin and turmeric**
- **200g (7oz) basmati rice**
- **Large handful coriander leaves, chopped**

1 Mix the yogurt and tikka paste, then coat and marinate the salmon for 10 mins.

2 Heat a spray of oil in a sauté pan. Cook chopped onion and red pepper for 5 mins, then add spices and cook for 2 mins more. Stir in rice with 400ml cold water. Bring to a simmer, cover and cook over a low heat until water is absorbed (8-10 mins). Set aside, covered, for 5 mins.

3 Cook the salmon under a medium-high grill for 10-15 mins. Spray a non-stick pan with oil and fry the sliced onion. Add the coriander to the rice and serve with the salmon fillets, garnished with sliced onion and lime wedges.

PER SERVING
484 cals; 18g fat; 3g sat fat; 50g carbs

Tuna fishcakes with mushy peas

Tuna canned in spring water retains vitamins and omega-3s that seep into oil.

SERVES 4
- **500g (1lb) baking potatoes, pricked and microwaved until tender (about 10 mins)**
- **2 tins tuna in spring water**
- **2tbsp capers, drained and roughly chopped**
- **½ bunch of spring onions, finely chopped**
- **Zest and juice of ½ lemon, plus wedges to serve**
- **1 egg, beaten**
- **2tbsp plain flour**
- **2tbsp olive oil**
- **750g (1½lb) frozen pea and bean mix**
- **100ml (3½fl oz) hot veg stock**
- **½ small bunch of fresh mint, leaves picked**

1 Scoop out the cooked flesh from the potatoes into a bowl and mash well. Add the tuna, capers, spring onions, lemon zest and juice and egg, season and mix well. Shape into 8 small patties and dust with the flour.

2 Heat half the oil in large frying pan, add the patties and cook for 3-4 mins over a medium heat until golden, then turn and cook for a further 3 mins until crisp.

3 Meanwhile, heat the remaining oil in a medium pan, add the pea and bean mix along with the hot stock, and cook for 10 mins until tender. Add the mint and whizz with a stick blender or in a food processor until coarsely crushed. Serve with the fishcakes and lemon wedges.

PER SERVING
228 cals; 13g fat; 3g sat fat; 10g carbs

Baked eggs

Great for an indulgent brunch or weekday meal, this is quick to make and very tasty – plus eggs are a great vitamin D booster !

SERVES 2

- **1tsp oil**
- **1 onion, chopped**
- **2 diced red pepper**
- **2 garlic clove, crushed**
- **200g tin chopped tomatoes**
- **2tsp paprika**
- **pinch of chilli flakes**
- **4 eggs**
- **Small bunch of fresh parsley, chopped**

1 Heat the oil in a non-stick pan, add the onion, red pepper and garlic and sauté for 3-4 mins.

2 Add the chopped tomatoes, paprika and chilli flakes. Cook for 5-10 mins until the mixture thickens.

3 Make 4 egg-shaped hollows in the mixture and crack 1 egg into each. Cover and cook over a medium heat for 5 mins, or until set. Sprinkle over the parsley and serve with toasted pitta.

Wild mushroom and ricotta pizza

Mushrooms are a fantastic source of vitamin D, and wild varieties make a delicious topping for a quick-to-make pizza bianco.

PER SERVING
373 cals; 12g fat; 4g sat fat; 49g carbs

SERVES 4

- **2 x 145g packs pizza base mix**
- **200g (7oz) baby spinach leaves**
- **1tbsp olive oil**
- **250g (9oz) mixed wild mushrooms, sliced**
- **2 garlic cloves, crushed**
- **200g (7oz) ricotta cheese**
- **2-3tbsp milk**
- **Few sage leaves**

1 Make up the pizza base mixes according to the packet instructions, then knead and roll into two large oblongs. Place each on a separate baking sheet and leave to rise while you make the topping.

2 Heat oven to 220°C, Gas 7. Put the spinach in a colander and pour boiling water over until wilted. Drain. Heat the oil in a pan, add the mushrooms and cook for 5 mins to soften. Add the garlic and cook until any moisture has evaporated. Squeeze the excess water from the spinach.

3 Mix the ricotta and milk, season and spread half over each pizza base. Spoon over the mushrooms, top with spinach and sage leaves. Bake for 10 mins until the bases are crisp.

Tuna niçoise salad

A protein-rich salad makes the perfect quick dinner or light lunch. This colourful Mediterranean meal is packed with vitamin D, thanks to sunny egg yolks, tuna and anchovies.

SERVES 4

- **200g (7oz) salad potatoes, halved**
- **4 eggs**
- **4 tuna steaks or 2 tins of tuna in spring water**
- **200g (7oz) trimmed French beans**
- **250g bag salad leaves**
- **200g (7oz) cherry tomatoes, halved**
- **1 avocado, sliced**
- **200g tin butter beans, drained**
- **50g (2oz) anchovy fillets, chopped**
- **24 black olives**

For the dressing

- **2tbsp olive oil**
- **1tbsp white wine vinegar**
- **1tbsp Dijon mustard**

1 In a pan of water, boil the potatoes for 10 mins. In a separate pan, boil eggs for 7 mins, then remove and plunge into a bowl of ice water.

2 Grill the tuna steaks (if using) for 8 mins until cooked, then set aside.

3 Put the French beans into a bowl with 2tbsp water, and microwave on HIGH for 2 mins. Drain and season. In a jug, mix all dressing ingredients together.

4 Toss the leaves with the potatoes, French beans, tomatoes, avocado, butter beans, anchovies and olives and divide equally between 4 plates.

5 Peel and halve the eggs, slice the tuna or drain the tinned tuna, and arrange on top of the salad with the dressing.

PER SERVING
664 cals; 36g fat; 5g sat fat; 33g carbs

COMPILED BY ROSE FOOKS. PHOTOS TI-MEDIACONTENT.COM

Your happiness *prescription*

Could you benefit from a dose of optimism? Use this positivity plan to boost your outlook on life

On a scale of one to ten, how happy are you today? Being permanently upbeat is unattainable, but anything below seven suggests there's scope for work to be done.

A complex formula of genes, behaviour traits and individual life circumstances determine our happiness levels. However, according to experts, it's entirely possible to "think ourselves happy" despite other influences. In fact, psychology professor Sonja Lyubomirsky* believes as much as 40% of our happiness is down to our state of mind.

So, how can we adopt a cheerier outlook? As with training our muscles or starting a diet plan, it takes commitment to the cause. Research proves that regularly practising positivity and affirmative actions results in change over time. Building these lasting habits increases optimism and resilience so we can live happy, engaged lives. Try these tips to top up your happiness tank.

'Those who laugh the most are likely to live longer'

An injection of laughter

Have you noticed how much better you feel after a good guffaw? Laughing is an easy way to reduce stress and instantly lift your spirits. 'Using humour helps you keep a positive, optimistic outlook during the tough times in life,' says psychologist Dr Meg Arroll. 'It's also a tool for bonding with others, which improves wellbeing.' A study in Norway showed those who laugh the most, are likely to live longer.

Movement is medicine

Exercise is a useful tool to have in our self-care kits and gives us a way of proactively building mental health resilience, says personal trainer Tally Rye, author of *Train Happy* (Pavilion). 'After you exercise, the brain can increase the happy neurotransmitters such as dopamine, serotonin, noradrenaline and endorphins, which are the ones that make you feel good,' she explains. 'And workouts don't need to be overly long or intense for you to feel those mood-enhancing benefits.'

Make keeping fit fun and it will never feel like a chore. Jumping on a mini trampoline, power walking with a loved one or whizzing through a field on a bike are all feel-good ways to work out.

SMILEY STATS

10

The results of a study** reveal having this many friends – or more – will boost wellbeing.

69

Feeling happy with life peaks at this age, say researchers.***

7.54

The average happiness score out of 10 for people in the UK, according to national statistics.

53

When we smile we can activate this many muscles in the face and body.

3 UPLIFTING PODCASTS

Look out for these on your podcast platform or app

HAPPIER
WITH
GRETCHEN RUBIN

+ **Happier with Gretchen Rubin**

The
Positive
Psychology
Podcast

+ **The Positive Psychology Podcast**

HAPPY PLACE

+ **Happy Place – Fearne Cotton**

UNLOCK CONTENTMENT

Action For Happiness has a blueprint to help you discover the secret to happier living. Drawing on psychological evidence, this "get-happy" movement shares the 10 keys that consistently have a positive impact on our wellbeing. Go to actionforhappiness.org to find them.

TAKE THE HAPPINESS HEALTH CHECK

Everyone's path to happiness is different, but our attitude to life can smooth the journey. Look inwards to see how many of these positive mental health changes you can make day-by-day.

CAN YOU... Reframe your thoughts?

Try to flip a negative into a positive. 'Give yourself permission to feel whatever you feel without judgement, but then make a conscious choice to focus on strengths, resources and solutions to get your needs met,' says Louise Murray, health and mindfulness coach (livewellwithlou.com).

ARE YOU... Kind to yourself?

Self-compassion can act as a powerful antidote to mental health difficulties, says Brendan Street, head of emotional wellbeing at Nuffield Health. 'It helps to think about the words you might say to someone else who is feeling low and needing encouragement, then use the same words and phrases to positively encourage yourself.'

DO YOU... Practise gratitude?

Showing appreciation for little things is a great mindset makeover tool. 'Try and be in the moment of whatever you are experiencing and mentally note down what you are grateful for,' says Louise. 'You'll shift your mindset into a positive "high vibe" zone.'

CURE THE BLUES

Studies show that people who are active over a long period of time are less likely to suffer from depression.

HOW ABOUT... Helping others?

The act of giving fires up areas of the brain associated with pleasure, social connection and trust. 'Helping others has powerful benefits in helping us feel more positive about ourselves and improving our physical health,' confirms psychotherapist Noel McDermott (noelmcdermott.net).

COULD YOU... Learn to let go?

Is there anything you can shed for a lighter, happier life? This could be toxic relationships, negative habits or physical items. 'Regularly look at the things you could leave behind in order to make space for all the good stuff,' says Louise.

5 WELLBEING WINS

1 BALANCE YOUR HORMONES Falling levels of oestrogen during menopause can directly impact your mood, causing you to feel low and fed up, angry or tearful,' says menopause expert Dr Louise Newson. Chat to your GP if you're struggling with symptoms.

2 SCENT YOUR SURROUNDINGS Lime, grapefruit and orange leaf essential oils can invigorate the soul. Spritz a ready-blended spray into the air for an instant mood uplift. Try **Energy High MoodFix Mist (tisserand.com).**

3 DRINK TEA Tea consumption is associated with reduced depression and anxiety, says Dr Tim Bond of the Tea Advisory Panel (teaadvisorypanel.com).

4 PHONE A FRIEND A study from the University of Michigan found that making contact with family and friends at least three times a week results in lower levels of depressive feelings. Hearing a loved one's voice can be more uplifting than chatting on text sometimes.

5 CATCH UP ON SLEEP 'A lack of it can have a real impact on our health and wellness – including our immune system and general mood – leading to irritability and exhaustion,' says GP Dr Gill Jenkins.

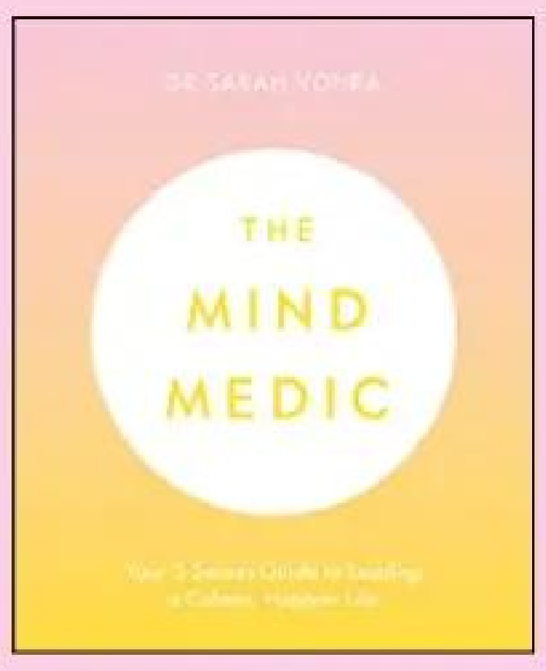
SHARE THE PROBLEM

If you feel unhappy or tearful, or are struggling to cope with everyday life, it may help to talk to someone. Whatever you're going through, the Samaritans are on hand to listen without judgement. Call them any time, from any phone, on 116 123.

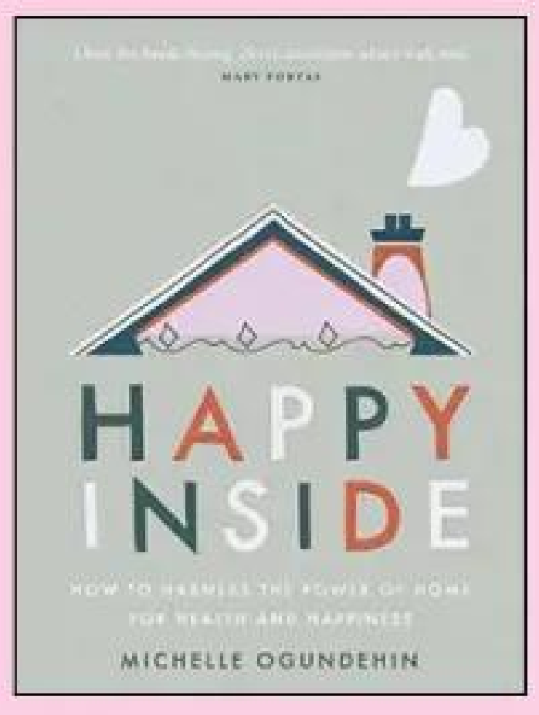
3 INSPIRING READS

These books will help you feel your best

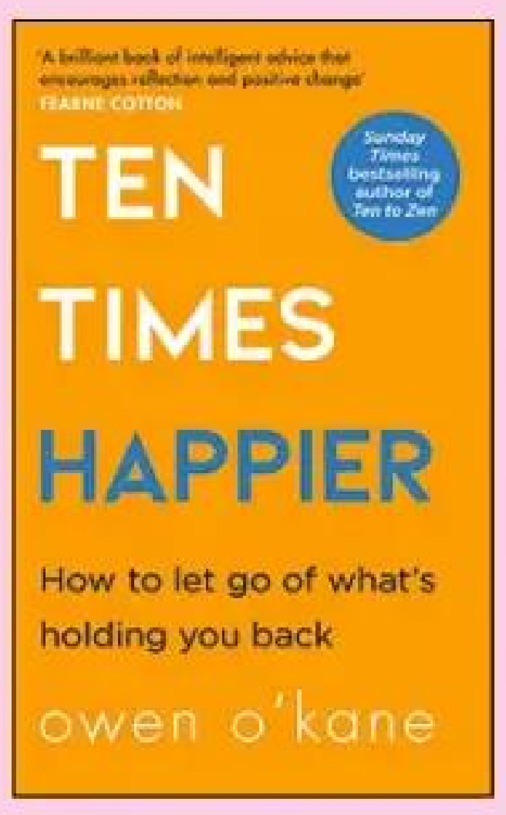
- ***The Mind Medic: Your 5 Senses Guide to Leading a Calmer, Happier Life* by Dr Sarah Vohra (Penguin Life).**



- ***Happy Inside* by Michelle Ogundehin, (Ebury Press).**



- ***Ten Times Happier: How to Let Go of What's Holding You Back* by Owen O'Kane, (HQ).**



Positivity on a plate

Diet plays a big role in happiness, says nutritionist Lily Soutter. Eat more of the following foods:

- Chicken and turkey
- Bananas
- Oats
- Strawberries
- Lentils
- Avocados
- Spinach
- Grapes
- Sesame seeds
- Raw nuts

BE MINDFUL OF...

- **Caffeine**

Too much is dehydrating and can make us feel jittery and anxious.

- **Sugar**

An energy crash and mood slump can swiftly follow this go-to quick fix.

- **Alcohol**

It's a depressant that can cause anger and sadness as well as feelings of anxiety the day after a booze binge.

YOUR MOOD IMPROVING CARE KIT

Upgrade your supplement shelf with these 'happy' nutrients

- **VITAMIN B12**

(Boost B12 oral spray, betteryou.com)

'B12 contributes to the normal function of the nervous and immune systems, so low levels can cause a whole host of symptoms that include low mood, irritability and fatigue,' says medical nutritionist Dr Michelle Braude.

- **MAGNESIUM**

(Food-Grown Magnesium, wildnutrition.com)

'This supports hormone balance, calms the nervous system, relieves stress and encourages sleep,' reveals nutritionist Cassandra Barns.

- **OMEGA-3**

(Together OceanPure Omega 3 Softgels, Holland & Barrett)

'Omega-3 nutrients have been shown to be effective in relieving the symptoms of depression, as well as having a beneficial effect on anxiety and premenstrual syndrome,' says Dr James Brown from the University of Aston.

- **VITAMIN D**

(Vitamin D Apple & Blackcurrant Gummies, healthspan.co.uk)

'We're all more prone to low levels of vitamin D due to being indoors more. A deficiency increases the likelihood of depression – it's also essential for bone health and immunity,' explains Healthspan head of nutrition Rob Hobson.

WORDS: ALI HORSFALL. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODEL): GETTY. *AUTHOR OF *THE HOW OF HAPPINESS* **JOURNAL OF EPIDEMIOLOGY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH ***AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY

POWER UP YOUR PLATE

GOOD MOOD FOODS

Diet plays a big role in happiness, so with the help of dietitian Helen Bond, we've got the foods to help you smile

Salmon

This power food is packed with vitamin B12, a vital vitamin for steering clear of depression and maintaining mental health. Salmon also contains mood-stabilising fatty acids. Helen reveals that omega-3 fats, especially DHA, are highly concentrated in the brain and are important for normal brain function and overall mental health.

Avocados

These protect your heart, help with digestion and are also great for improving mood. Avocados are natural hormone balancers, which allow your brain to make the right chemicals needed to ensure you feel good.

Oats

'Wholegrain carbs release their energy slowly, keeping blood-sugar levels steady – so they're better for refuelling the brain and enhancing mood,' says Helen.

Chicken & turkey

Both chicken and turkey are good sources of mood-boosting tryptophan. This amino acid helps increase melatonin levels in the brain, which regulates sleep and is vital for a healthy mind and body.

Strawberries

They taste great and are uber rich in vitamin C, which means they contribute to producing happy chemicals in the brain.

Lentils

Lentils help to increase levels of serotonin – the brain's feel-good neurotransmitter, resulting in reduced anxiety and a calmer state of mind.

Bananas

Like poultry, this fab lunchbox filler is also packed with tryptophan, along with vitamins B6 and C, plus potassium – a great all-rounder!

Bad-mood foods...

✱ Caffeine Despite the instant high, it can cause long-term dehydration and leave you feeling irritable and jumpy.

✱ Sugar Another quick fix that'll make you feel worse through a sudden slump and energy crash.

✱ Alcohol This quick fix is actually a depressant and can cause anger, paranoia and sadness, plus feelings of anxiety the next day.

3 STEPS TO SMILES

Simple ways to boost your mood throughout the day...

1 **Always start the day with breakfast** Helen explains that a healthy brekkie replenishes energy levels after a long period without food.

2 **Eat regularly** Skipping meals is never the way forward to good health, both mental and physical. Helen reveals that it can result in low blood-sugar levels, which will inevitably make you tired and irritable.

3 **Stay hydrated** Our brains are made up of 75% water, so it's no surprise it's vital for healthy and happy brain function. Helen recommends drinking at least 1.6 litres every day, and definitely more in hot weather or if you're active.

WORDS: EMILY JEFFERIES. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

Raw nuts

Helen explains, 'All nuts are rich in plant protein, fibre, unsaturated fats, vitamin E and magnesium – a nutrient that is important for psychological wellbeing.' Stick to a small handful, though!

Spinach

A generally great veggie that's full of vitamins, spinach is also high in iron. Helen warns, 'Extreme tiredness, poor concentration and low mood can all be attributed to anaemia – an energy-zapping condition caused by low iron levels.'

Sesame seeds

Sesame seeds contain tyrosine – an amino acid that boosts dopamine levels in the brain. But how do we get them into our diet? Sprinkle on salads and soups, or add them to a smoothie.

Happy news!

Scientists in the US have found one glass of wine can act as an antidepressant – particularly if you're stressed – so one tiny tipple isn't totally out of the question.

Grapes

Grapes are full of antioxidants that have been found to affect mood. No overdosing on wine, though! Stay happy with a bunch of grapes instead.

Gratitude IS GOOD FOR YOU

Even when it's hard to be positive, being thankful is a great way to feel better

Gratitude isn't just about saying thank you to a particular person or group of people; it can encompass everything in our lives. 'Practising gratitude trains the mind to tune in to the good things,' says psychologist Miriam Akhtar.

Gratitude is good for us, both emotionally and physically, she explains. 'It's associated with higher levels of life satisfaction, hope and forgiveness, and lower levels of anxiety and loneliness.'

In one study, participants were asked to write a few sentences each week. One group wrote about things they were grateful for, one group wrote about things that had annoyed them, and a third group wrote from a neutral point of view. After ten weeks, the grateful group felt better about their lives and visited the doctor less than those who had written negative things. Here are five ways to feel more grateful.

1 *Harness the power of three*

Have you ever spent ages worrying about one negative remark, while forgetting all the compliments you've received? Positive psychologists talk about a "negativity bias", where negative thoughts are stronger than positive ones. A good way to change this is doing the "three good things" exercise. Ask yourself every day: "What's good in my life? What am I grateful for? What's going well?" Akhtar points out that in tumultuous times, gratitude can be a powerful antidote: 'Autonomy is one of the fundamental needs for wellbeing – but practising gratitude helps us notice what we still have.'

TRY IT 'Ask yourself the "three good things" questions at a set time every day or incorporate it into a routine, and it'll become a habit,' says Akhtar.

OUR EXPERTS

MIRIAM AKHTAR is a psychologist. She is the author of *Positive Psychology for Overcoming Depression* (Watkins Publishing).

DEBORAH SMITH is a psychologist, speaker and teacher of mindfulness meditation. She is the author of *Grow Your Own Happiness* (Aster).

2 Reframe your past

While you're thinking about what you're grateful for, it's natural for your thoughts to begin to wander to negative events or emotions. 'Rather than avoiding those things, it's best to acknowledge them, then refocus your attention on the good stuff in life,' says Akhtar. 'As the saying goes, what you focus on grows. The more you invest your time and effort in growing the positive, it feels like the negative emotions are starting to shrink.'

TRY IT Rather than labelling events in your past as "good" or "bad", try to reserve judgement and really reflect on those things. Sometimes, we realise that something we labelled bad at the time led to positive events later. You may have lost out on your "dream job" or "perfect house", but then found one that was much better suited to you down the line. The key to being positive is looking at things in a mindful way.

3 Think visually

If you're more of a visual person, a gratitude board is a great idea. Collect photos and cut pictures out of magazines, then stick them inside a large picture frame. Think about what you've been grateful for this year – whether it's your family, your home and garden, local beauty spots or hobbies you've enjoyed. You can stick anything on your board, from dried flowers to paintings by children and grandchildren. As Smith points out, 'A lot of social media during 2020 was people posting pictures of their daily walks and being grateful for nature. People are more aware of things they might have taken for granted before.'

TRY IT Make or buy a pinboard to be your gratitude board. For a quicker, more adaptable version, try fixing a whiteboard to the wall or using your fridge door. Simply attach pictures with magnets, and scribble on things that you're grateful for that day.

4 Pay it forward

Concentrating on everything you have to be grateful for might sound like you're being self-absorbed or complacent. But it can be a powerful way to connect to wider society. 'Being positive increases our resilience and also our ability to help others,' says psychologist Deborah Smith. 'It's like when the oxygen masks drop down in the aeroplane and you're told to put yours on first – if we are in a good place we can help others, but if we're worrying about others and feel anxious and depressed, we're all going down!'

Smith points out that gratitude is closely linked to reciprocity – when someone does something lovely for you, you'll want to do something lovely in return. 'That's where reflection is helpful,' she says. 'You remember the things that somebody else has done for you, and even if they're not in your life anymore, you can "pay it forward" to someone else. Gratitude is important because it strengthens our relationships – you feel that someone has been there for you when you needed it.'

TRY THIS Many people buy new things to make them happy, but this pleasure is fleeting. If you do more things focused on others, rather than yourself, whether it's formal volunteering or helping friends and neighbours in need, it can distract you from the negativity of your feelings or circumstances, and can be the route to a deeper form of happiness.

5 Write it down

Once you've got into the habit of thinking more positively, try writing a gratitude journal. Smith says, 'It's especially important to practise gratitude when we're all having a tough time and the news is bleak because it's really easy to get overwhelmed. So we need to compensate consciously for that and not be half-hearted about it.' Research suggests we should try to have at least three positive thoughts to outweigh every negative thought, and at the end of your day, write down a few things that you're grateful for. But Smith recommends you only write three to four times a week, rather than every night, as it won't have the same effect if it starts becoming a chore. Take the opportunity to look back at previous entries too.

TRY IT 'Don't allow yourself to repeat things in your journal,' says Smith. 'If you avoid repetition, you stretch your ability to see the more subtle things to be grateful for. That's when it goes onto a deeper level.'

WORDS: CLAIRE SWEETING. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Why we should all KEEP A JOURNAL

Everyone, it seems, is writing down their thoughts and memories. But journaling is about so much more – it can uplift and inspire you too, says Tanya Pearey

From Samuel Pepys to Adrian Mole and Bridget Jones – what's not to love about a great diary? Years pass and times change but there's something constant and comforting about picking up a pen and keeping a record, even if entries are for your eyes only.

These days, however, it's all about the journal – modern-day diary-keeping with a focus on goals and self-improvement, reflection and wellness, problem-solving and creativity. This is not just an account of what you did and felt today. It could be a bullet journal, for planning days and setting targets. Or a gratitude journal, to reflect and appreciate. Or even a companion journal, designed to accompany bestselling books by the likes of former First Lady Michelle Obama, businesswoman Sophia Amoruso and writer Bella Mackie, so that readers can take their inspiration further.

GETTING STARTED

Worried about what to write or finding the time? Here's how to get going…

✣ **WRITE A TO-DO LIST** The satisfaction of getting organised and the sense of achievement when drawing a line through completed tasks is reward in itself.

✣ **LIST THREE GOOD THINGS ABOUT YOUR DAY** US research shows that being grateful can help you shift a negative mindset, feel happier and sleep better.

✣ **LIST THREE THINGS YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO TOMORROW** 'Envisaging a positive future is fundamental for increased happiness and wellbeing,' says positive psychologist Miriam Akhtar, author of *The Little Book of Happiness*.

✣ **FEEL DAUNTED BY A BOOK OF BLANK PAGES?** Choose a structured journal with questions to answer and tasks and lists to complete. Try Michelle Obama's *Becoming: A Guided Journa*l (£15.99, Viking).

✣ **USE A SPECIAL PEN** Ink fountain pens are great but roller-balls or humble ballpoints can work too. Experiment with different nib widths and choose no-bleed options for fragile-papered bullet journals. For an arty look, try specialist calligraphy pens.

My 20-year-old daughter has been a devotee for three years, writing hers every day, and declaring, 'How can anyone know what they've got to do – what they want from life – without one?'

At the start of 2020, she handed me a leather-bound book with pages ruled by dots, not lines, and announced, 'Here. Your first bullet journal!'

I thought I'd managed just fine (more or less) for half a century. 'What do I write?' I asked. 'Whatever you want,' came the reply. 'That's the beauty of it. You could start with a to-do list. It might stop you forgetting stuff.'

> 'It's a very simple way to reflect – illuminating and therapeutic'

Journaling isn't just about getting organised. It's affordable DIY therapy. 'Writing things down helps us identify and clarify what we're thinking and feeling,' says counsellor Jo Bisseker Barr, who runs writing for wellness courses from her Hampshire home.

'Working with people in the therapy room, I often recommend that they write to help their thinking. Keeping a journal is a very simple way to reflect. It's illuminating and therapeutic.'

It can ease anxiety by stopping thoughts ruminating in your head and making you pay attention to what's around you – mindfulness in written form if you will. And don't worry if you're not a writer – you can doodle, make lists, attach pictures and create mind maps.

My daughter's journal is a riot of colour-coded lists, calligraphy and cropped photos, bordered by patterned washi tape. Every page is a work of art.

Studies show that people who engage in an artistic pursuit are healthier and less depressed than those who don't, according to the Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

And you don't have to be Rembrandt. A study by America's Drexel University found that creating an artwork (even a simple drawing) reduces the amount of stress hormone, cortisol, in your body.

'Creative activities can help us switch off from day-to-day pressures and turn negative feelings into something positive,' says Stephen Buckley from mental health charity Mind. 'Arts therapies are an effective treatment for mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, as well as more severe mental health problems.'

Health benefits of journaling may be physical too – cutting your body's levels of stress hormones can help your heart, brain and immune system. Researchers at the University of Arizona found that keeping a journal after a divorce lowered people's heart rate as well as helped them make sense of their experience emotionally.

A study by the University of Lancaster suggests writing down your experiences helps you remember them later, making diary-keeping useful in delaying age-related memory loss. And Dr James Pennebaker, author of *Opening Up by Writing It Down*, found that journaling can boost immunity by strengthening T-lymphocyte cells.

I don't know what starting a journal has done for the health of my heart or my immune system, but it's certainly helped my memory. I'm now a convert to the daily to-do list and my one-sentence summing up of each day (often quite a long sentence!) is as fun as it is reflective. And when my memory fails in years to come I can always leaf back and remember.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Is *everything* making you ANGRY?

Feeling frustrated? Can't tame that temper? Here's how to get to grips with rage and reap the wellbeing benefits...

There are many situations that can make your blood boil. A friend lets you down at the last minute, you're stuck in traffic, your computer crashes... If you want to safeguard your emotional and physical health, it's important to learn how to deal with your anger in a healthy way.

A survey by the Mental Health Foundation (mentalhealth.org.uk) has found that more than one in ten people have trouble controlling their anger. 'Anger raises your risk of high blood pressure and heart disease,' says clinical psychologist Dr Helen Nightingale. 'It triggers the flight or fight response – your heart beats faster, blood pressure goes up and you produce more stress hormones.' Anger can also lead to depression, anxiety, insomnia and a weakened immune system.

'It's normal to feel angry occasionally,' says Mike Fisher, director of The British Association of Anger Management. 'But it's how you express your anger that counts. Being assertive is the healthiest way of communicating feelings and needs. Passive aggression is where you sulk, patronise and use sarcasm and evasion instead of saying how you really feel. Active aggressive behaviour is where you scream, hurl abuse, threaten and intimidate. Such tactics are unhelpful and toxic.'

Anger-busting tactics

1 HUM LIKE A BUMBLE BEE

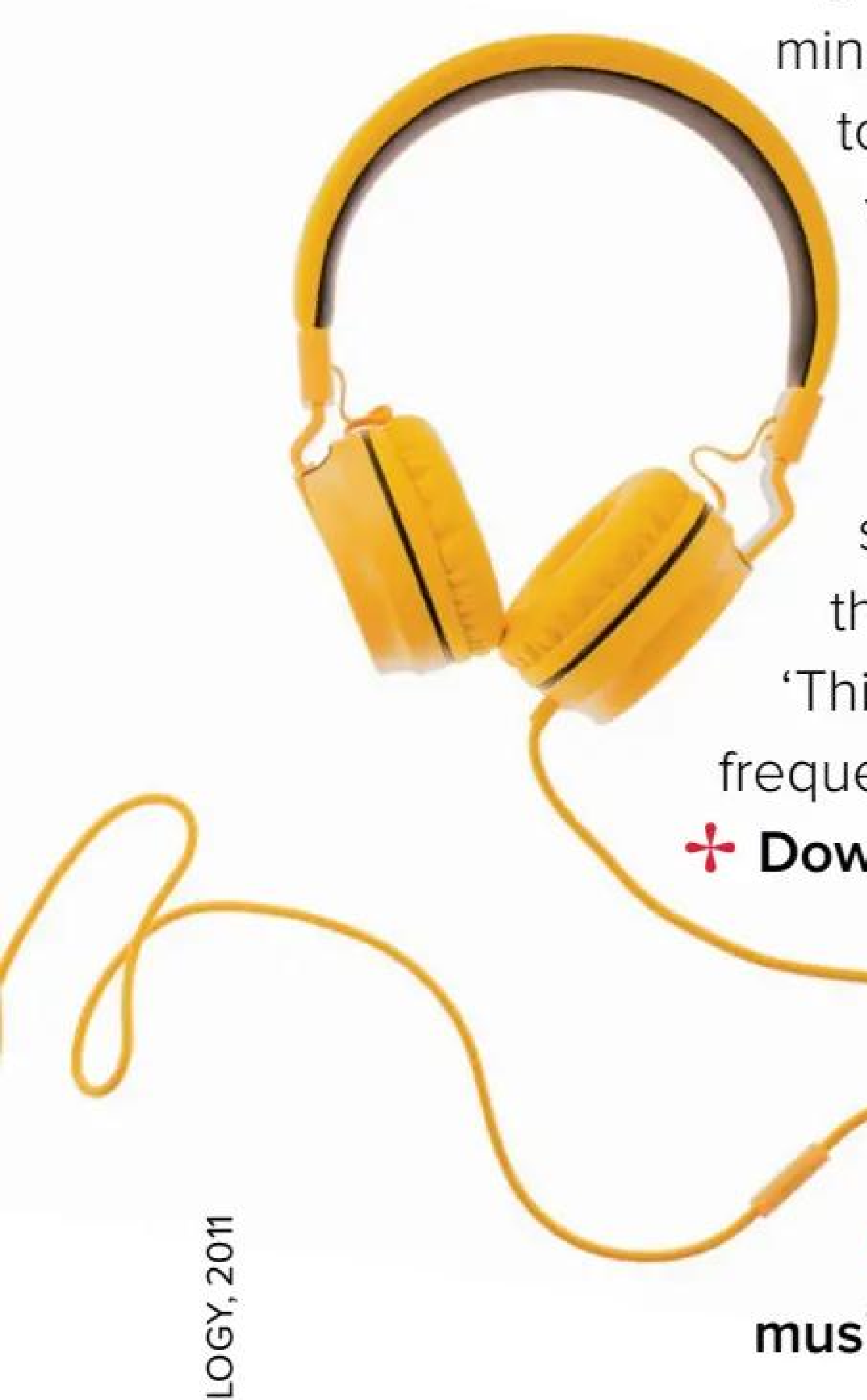
'The quickest way to reduce tension and stress when you're feeling angry is to focus on your breathing,' explains Sandeep Agarwalla, head of yoga at Ananda in the Himalayas. 'A simple calming technique is the humming bee breath.'

- Sitting comfortably, plug both ears with your index fingers.
- Take a slow deep breath.
- Exhale slowly and make a humming sound. Feel the vibration in your head.
- Repeat for a few minutes, until you feel calm.

2 LISTEN TO 432 MUSIC

Listening to music that has been tuned to 432Hz will calm you down and fill you with a sense of peace and wellbeing in as little as two minutes. 'Music that is tuned to a 432Hz frequency vibrates at the same rhythm as the earth's heartbeat (known as the Schumann resonance),' says singer and sound therapist Denise Leicester. 'This is the optimum frequency for good health.'

- **Download 432 Soul Medicine music from soulmedicine.me/music**
- **Listen to classical music by Mozart or Verdi.**



3 KEEP AN ANGER JOURNAL

'You are what you think,' says Dr Helen Nightingale. 'If your thinking is angry, you need to understand why this is. Keep a diary to see what thoughts trigger your emotional responses. If you have an angry outburst, write down what sets you off. Angry people usually have a parent that was angry. It's a learned behaviour. Having emotional management therapy may be useful. For example, dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) can help you to manage your emotions and behaviour. Visit behavioraltech.org/resources/find-a-therapist.

4 THE 90-SECOND FIX

Next time you feel angry, count to 90. That's how long it takes to calm down. Neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor says, 'We experience anger when the "anger circuit" in our brain is stimulated. Anger is just a group of cells in our brain that have been triggered and we have the power to choose to act or not. It only takes 90 seconds for that circuit to settle down.'

5 LOOK AFTER YOUR LIVER

'In traditional Chinese medicine, the emotion associated with the liver is anger,' explains acupuncturist Elaine Gibbons. 'So, if you're very hot-headed, irritable and get angry easily, this suggests that your liver energy (chi) is out of balance.'

Elaine suggests the following to balance liver energy:

- Any kind of physical activity such as dancing, running, tennis, walking, yoga or swimming.
- Creativity nourishes liver chi, so have a go at art, dance, singing, photography or painting.
- Make sure you eat lot of fibrous vegetables and leafy greens.
- Avoid alcohol, greasy and fried foods.
- Learn to express your emotions. Suppressing negative feelings can lead to a build-up of resentment and anger that can unbalance liver energy.
- Have a course of acupuncture. To find a local practitioner, head to acupuncture.org.uk.

19%

Angry and hostile adults are this much more likely to develop heart disease.*

6 FLOWER ESSENCES

'Flower remedies work on the psyche, helping to rebalance mood and emotions, including anger, says Bach Flower practitioner Kyoko Yanagawa. She recommends these Bach Flower remedies for different types of anger...

- **Holly** – if you're filled with negative feelings (hatred, envy, spite, suspicion) that fuel your anger.
- **Impatiens** – if you're irritable, frustrated and snappy, because you're always rushing around.
- **Cherry plum** – if you're prone to uncontrollable, angry outbursts.
- **Willow** – if you often feel resentful, bitter and hard done by. You might be passive aggressive.

bachremedies.com

7 MEDITATE DAILY

'This improves mental clarity,' says Sandeep Agarwalla. 'If your thinking is calm, clear, bright and alert, you're less likely to react with anger.' A recent study showed that one 20-minute meditation can help reduce the harmful physical effects of anger by lowering blood pressure and heart rate and slowing down breathing.**

WORDS: EVA GIZOWSKA. PHOTOS: GETTY

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*JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF CARDIOLOGY, 2011

**CONSCIOUSNESS AND COGNITION, 2016

Are you about to BURN OUT?

Most of us have days where we feel depleted and drained, but if that's how you feel most of the time, you may be suffering from burnout...

There are times when a bit of stress can be energising. If you've got an urgent deadline at work, a shot of adrenaline can fire you up and sharpen your focus. But, when stress becomes unmanageable, it has the opposite effect. If you take work home and lie awake stressing about it, you're a prime candidate for burnout.

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that burnout was included in the updated International Classification of Diseases as an occupational phenomenon.

WHO defines burnout as "chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed".

'The first major symptom is that you feel absolutely exhausted all the time,' reveals clinical psychologist Dr Michael Drayton. 'Other key symptoms include feeling negative and cynical about your job, and reduced work performance.'

'Burnout will also have an impact on your home and social life,' adds occupational psychologist Kate Keenan. 'It can cause anxiety, insomnia and depression. It's also associated with a wide variety of physical ailments.'

AVOIDING BURNOUT

Nip it in the bud and get back to feeling yourself, pronto.

RECOGNISE THAT YOU MAY HAVE A PROBLEM

'Burnout isn't the same as too much stress,' explains Keenan. 'You can be under a lot of pressure yet feel in control. Instead, burnout is a reaction to ongoing stress: you can't seem to bounce back after a break or a good night's sleep. Everything feels like an effort, all the time.' If you feel like this, it's time to take action.

MAKE EXERCISE A PRIORITY

'Regular exercise of at least 30 to 60 minutes a day helps your body to discharge excess stress chemicals,' says Kate. 'You'll also produce more endorphins to make you feel better.' Try walking, cycling, yoga, swimming or even dancing.

SET BOUNDARIES

Don't overextend yourself. 'You're more likely to suffer from burnout if you find it hard to be assertive and say no,' says Dr Drayton. 'You may benefit from taking an assertiveness training course.'

STOP BEING A HUMAN GIVER

'Human giver syndrome is the contagious false belief that life only has meaning if you're always accommodating, generous, supportive and attentive to the needs of others,' says Emily, co-author of *Burnout: The Secret to Solving the Stress Cycle* (Vermilion). 'Women are the most susceptible to be like this. So, if you're always there for everyone else to the detriment of your own needs, you need to step back.'

TAKE 42% REST

'On average you need to spend 42% of your time on rest. That's around ten hours a day, but it doesn't have to be every day. You can average it out over a week, or a month or more. Here's what 42% might look like: ✢ Around eight hours sleep. ✢ 20-30 minutes of stress-reducing conversation with a partner or trusted loved one. ✢ 30 minutes' exercise. ✢ 30 minutes paying attention to food such as planning meals, shopping, cooking, eating. ✢ 30 minutes doing what you enjoy such as reading, extra physical activity, talking to a friend etc.

TAKE REGULAR BREAKS

'No matter how busy you are, make sure you take regular breaks whether that be for lunch, to make a cup of tea, or just get up from your desk and stretch your legs,' says Dr Drayton.

STOP TRYING TO BE PERFECT

Emily explains, 'Believing that everything has to be perfect – at home, the way you look, at work – is associated with a greater risk of anxiety, depression, disordered eating, negative relationships and helplessness. The antidote to perfectionism is to try and practice self-compassion, gratitude and acceptance.'

EAT WELL

'This can have a huge impact on your mood and energy levels,' says nutritionist Rick Hay. 'The right food helps your body cope better when you're under pressure.' Rick recommends:

✢ Avoiding processed foods, white carbs and caffeine
✢ Adding protein to every meal to keep blood sugar levels stable. Try chicken, turkey, fish, chickpeas, lentils, eggs, nuts and seeds
✢ Eat healthy fats. Try avocado, nuts and oily fish
✢ Leafy green vegetables
✢ Foods high in vitamin C
✢ Low GI foods eg wholegrains, rye bread and brown rice

TAKE A HERBAL SUPPLEMENT

Rick says certain herbs help to calm the body, improve mood and boost cognitive function. 'These include panax and ashwagandha.' Try: Wholistic Ashwagandha, pukkaherbs.com

ARE YOU SUFFERING?

You may be heading for burnout if you experience any of these signs and symptoms...

✢ You wake up every day with a feeling of dread about work
✢ You feel tired and drained most of the time
✢ You feel helpless and trapped
✢ You procrastinate and take longer to get things done
✢ You're eating and/or drinking more to make yourself feel better
✢ You feel mentally exhausted
✢ You feel burdened by too many responsibilities and a lack of support
✢ You do enough to get by but haven't the energy to care anymore
✢ You're taking more days off
✢ You feel increasingly negative, cynical and resentful about work
✢ You feel unappreciated
✢ You feel you just can't cope
✢ You feel like a failure
✢ You've lost all your motivation
✢ You feel anxious, worried or depressed
✢ You have become more withdrawn
✢ You feel more irritable
✢ You're not getting enough sleep
✢ You're working so hard it's affecting your home and social life
✢ Your friends and family are concerned that they never see you
✢ You've got no time for personal relationships
✢ You're always working in the evenings and over the weekend
✢ You feel physically rundown
✢ You've developed physical symptoms for no obvious medical reason, which could include back pain, headaches, skin rashes, general aches and pains, IBS-type symptoms and insomnia

WORDS: EVA GIZOWSKA. PHOTO: GETTY

Simple SELF SOOTHERS

Feeling out of sorts? Gently rebalance your body and mind with these healing health tips

During challenging times, our bodies seize up and our minds shut down. But there are easy ways to reduce physical and emotional stress and unwind – from deep breathing to a good soak in the bath. Here's what to try…

INHALE… EXHALE

'When we're angry, tense or scared, our muscles tighten and our breathing becomes shallow,' says Stephanie Reynolds of wellness space, the House of Wisdom*. 'Lengthening the breath will increase oxygen levels in the body, helping to calm you down.'

TRY THIS

- Place your left hand on your chest and the right on your stomach. Exhale completely, emptying the lungs of air.
- Inhale through the nose and feel your belly start to rise under your hand. At the top of the breath, hold it for a couple of seconds, without straining.
- Exhale fully through the mouth, making the exhale longer than the inhale. If you inhale for a count of three, then exhale for a count of six.
- Notice how your mind and heart rate start to slow down as you lengthen your breath.

GET IN THE KITCHEN

Nourish your body by cooking more meals from scratch. You can control the amount of fat, sugar and salt that goes into your food, and boost fibre, vitamin and mineral intake by adding plenty of healthy ingredients to dishes. But that's not all. 'Mental health experts believe home cooking eases stress, anxiety and depression by giving us something to concentrate on, distracting us from unpleasant thoughts and providing a sense of achievement and satisfaction once the dish is finished,' says dietitian Juliette Kellow.

SWITCH YOUR BEDTIME TIPPLE

Struggling to nod off? As tempting as it is to reach for a nightcap, studies show that alcohol hinders, rather than helps, our sleep – especially when drinking too close to bedtime – as it takes around one hour for the body to process one unit of alcohol, says Dr Sarah Jarvis, GP and medical advisor to charity Drinkaware. Try Bird & Blend Lazy Boy tea, **birdandblendtea.com/uk_en**, with rooibos lavender, cocoa and coconut.

WATCH FISH

There's a reason we see fish tanks in GP surgeries and dentist waiting rooms. According to research, watching aquariums leads to reductions in blood pressure and heart rate – and higher numbers of fish help to hold people's attention for longer. 'There's robust evidence to show that doses of exposure to underwater settings could have a positive impact on wellbeing,' says Nicola Bridge at the Ocean Conservation Trust.

TRY ACUPRESSURE

This ancient alternative therapy sends signals to the body to aid healing and boost wellness. 'One of the main pressure points that will soothe and relieve anxiety when stimulated is the Yin Tang acupoint located between the eyebrows,' says acupuncturist Renata Nunes. 'The CV17 acupoint found in the centre of the chest, between the nipples, also works to calm the heart and deepen the breath.' Gently apply pressure for 30-40 seconds at a time.

GO ON A 'SOUND' STROLL

We've all rediscovered the importance of a simple walk – but could you still be getting more out of yours? 'A "sound walk" is a walking meditation, when the sounds you hear while you're out are as important as the sights you see,' explains Tania Ahsan, author of *Everyday Calming Rituals* (Trigger Publishing). 'This mindful approach helps you become aware of the sounds that you hear each day and allows you to form a memory of feeling attentive, relaxed and aware whenever you hear that sound.' Tune in to birdsong, the wind in the trees or even the hum of traffic next time you're wandering.

JOT IT DOWN

People who write about gratitude are more optimistic – which can increase the ability to cope with adversities, says a study**. 'I recommend journaling for five minutes each evening with the focus on what went well in the day, what could be improved, and noting down at least one thing that you are grateful for,' suggests Kira Mahal, founder of the workplace wellness provider Reset LDN. 'This helps you to understand what you might be struggling with.'

FEELING WORRIED? During the summer of 2020, 8.5 million Brits thought the pandemic had affected their wellbeing***

SCENT YOUR SPACE

Essential oils have the power to reset your mood and promote relaxation, so have a stress-relieving spritz around your home. The And Breath Air Cleansing Room Spray, antoniaburrell.com, is a calming blend of lavender, dalmatian sage, eucalyptus leaf and frankincense.

SOAK AWAY STRESS

After a challenging day, run a bath before bed and sprinkle magnesium flakes into the water. This "magic" mineral is known to relieve muscle tension and encourage a deep and restful sleep too. We recommend Magnesium Flakes, betteryou.com.

RELEASE THE KNOTS

A tight neck and back muscles lead to poor mobility, pain and headaches, and are often caused by chronic stress, bad posture or hours spent hunched over devices. Massage away all that tension with a minute or two of percussive therapy. Although not cheap, self-massage guns, such as Liv Essential Theragun, theragun.com, work by rapidly compressing soft tissue to stimulate blood flow, increasing oxygen to the muscle.

3 SOOTHING SUPPLEMENTS

✣ **CBD** Cannabidiol (CBD) works on the body's endocannabinoid system and increases the "bliss" molecule. Try Soothe You CBD gummies, withpollen.com.

✣ **LAVENDER OIL** Around 98% of women feel anxious at menopause, says Anxiety UK. Try Kalms Lavender One-A-Day Capsules, kalmsrange.co.uk.

✣ **ASHWAGANDHA** Regulates imbalanced cortisol levels. Try Organic Ashwagandha capsules, pukkaherbs.com.

WORDS: ALI HORSFALL. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES. *HOUSEOFWISDOMSTUDIO.COM.
**JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY. ***ONS SURVEY

Eat to beat... STRESS

Frazzled? Worn out? Finding it hard to stay on top of everything? Follow our guide to the right foods to eat your way to a calmer you

We all go through stressful periods in our lives. If you meet someone who remains calm 24/7, they're worthy of a medal! Some stress is natural, and learning to handle it is key, but what you eat can have a huge effect.

Nutritionist Rob Hobson explains that while it's widely accepted that many of our food choices are influenced by how we feel, research also shows that certain foods can change brain chemistry and physiology, which may affect mood. So, make these dietary tweaks to help ease stress...

BOOST YOUR B VITAMINS

Vitamin B6 can be useful. Rob explains that most of us get enough vitamin B6 but the effects of stress can deplete the body of this nutrient and disrupt sleep. 'Oily fish is a rich source of this vitamin, as are seeds, poultry, avocado and spinach.'

Vitamin B foods

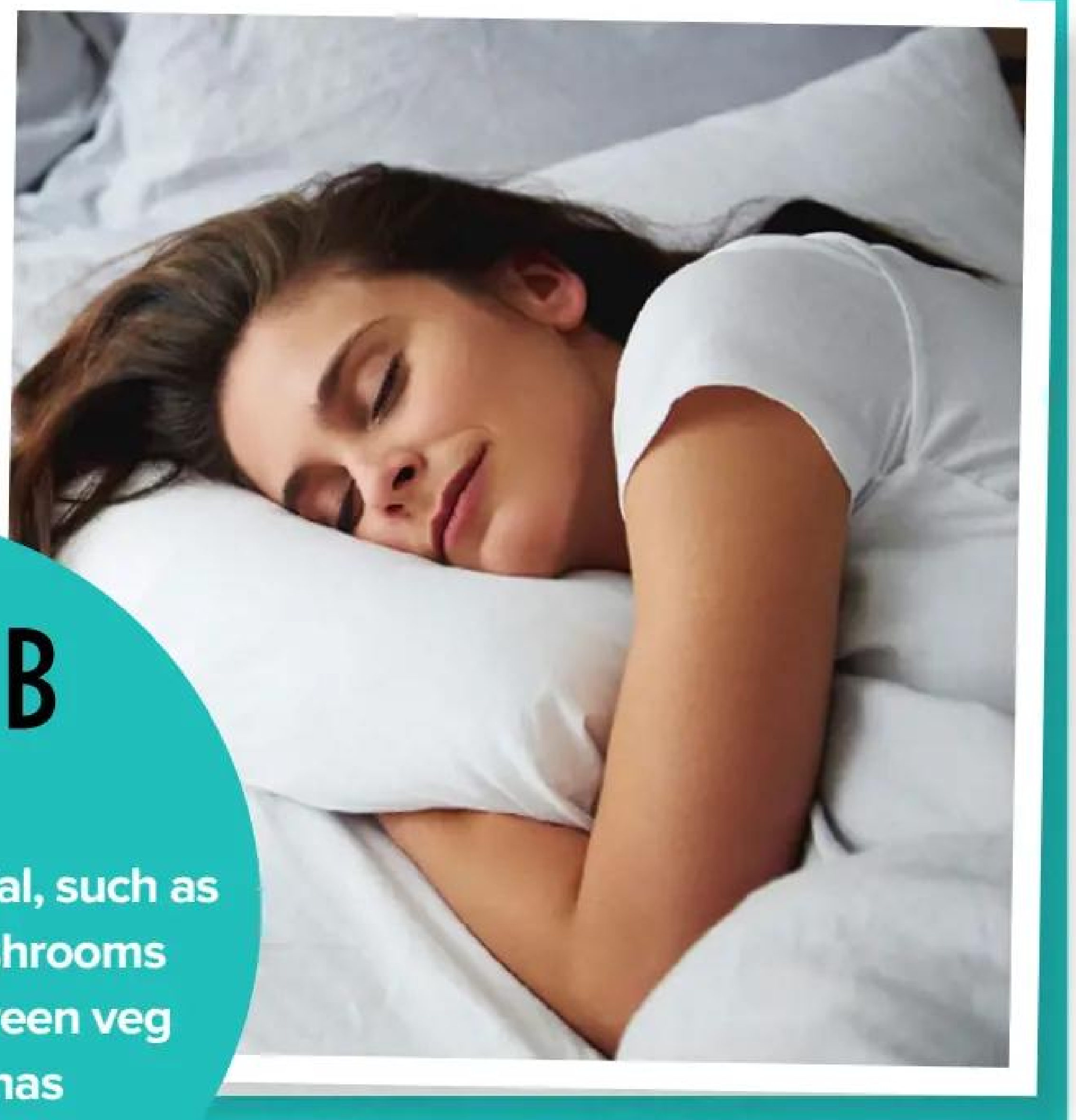
✱ Lentils ✱ Eggs ✱ Offal, such as liver ✱ Beans ✱ Mushrooms Nuts and seeds ✱ Green veg ✱ Oats ✱ Bananas ✱ Dried fruit

EAT TO AID SLEEP

Rob recommends eating foods containing the amino acid tryptophan – which is linked to inducing a soporific state that may help you relax – before you sleep. Try eating poultry, tofu and dairy with lower-glycaemic carbohydrates, such as rice, potatoes, pasta and bread, for maximum effect.

Calcium can also help the brain to use tryptophan to make melatonin – to help us sleep – and low levels have also been shown to make it difficult to nod off. Include calcium-rich dairy, soy, beans and green veg in your diet.

Also, aim to eat your evening meal earlier, as the effects of digestion can push your body's core temperature upwards, which may disrupt sleep.



SNACK RIGHT

Don't snack on sugar between meals. 'If you want a sugary treat or pudding, include them with your meal to limit the effect on blood sugar,' advises Rob.

Snack on fibre-rich foods to keep you full. Fibre is broken down slowly in the body, providing a "drip feed" of energy. Wholemeal breads and crackers can be topped with canned tuna or fruit

spread. Or try nuts, seeds and oats. Protein is important for promoting fullness. Opt for cold meats, canned fish, smoked salmon, boiled eggs, cheese, milk, plant milks, nuts and protein shakes – Rob says they're a quick way to get a hit of protein to help fill you up between meals.

And if you simply can't do without a coffee or two, opt for decaf. Stimulants such as coffee can increase feelings of anxiety.

DON'T SKIP MEALS!

At a basic biological level, the effects of blood sugar can impact mood and wider mental health conditions. 'Skipping meals can lead to low energy levels and leave you feeling "fuzzy", anxious and unable to centre yourself when hunger sets in,' says Rob. This is when you reach for quick-fix snacks or energy drinks loaded with sugar.

'It leads to a merry-go-round of sugar highs and lows, fuelled by more of the same foods and drinks,' explains Rob. Skipping meals also means missed opportunities to nourish your body with essential B vitamins and magnesium.

'Magnesium helps with muscle relaxation and has also been associated with easing PMS and menopausal mood swings and aiding sleep,' he adds.

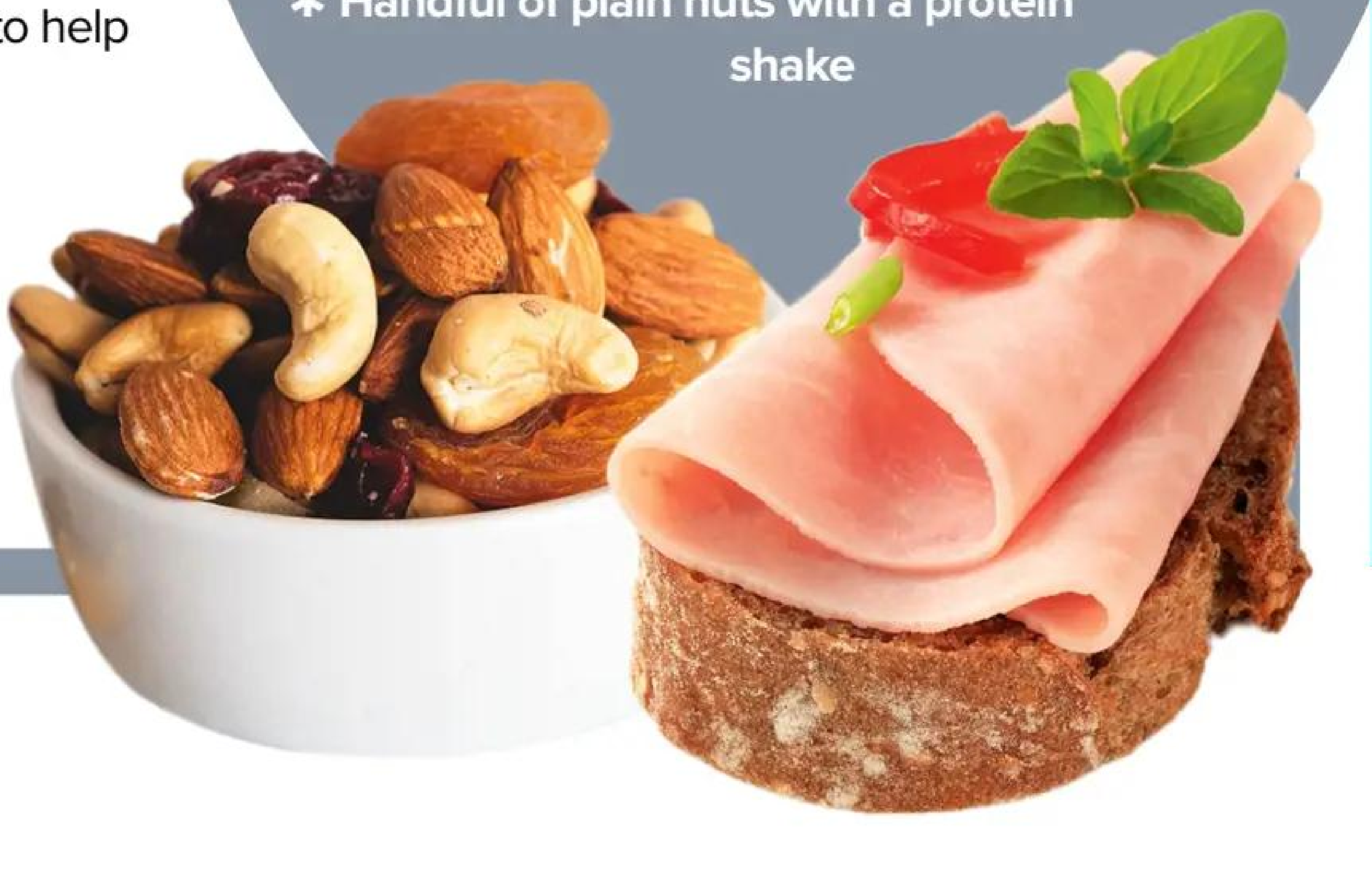
Max your magnesium

*** Wholegrains * Nuts (especially cashews) * Seeds * Spinach * Oily fish (especially mackerel) * Raw cacao (high cocoa-solids dark chocolate) * Beans and pulses * Quinoa * Avocado**

Or top up with a supplement such as Opti-Magnesium (healthspan.co.uk)

7 stress-free snacks in 7 days

- *** 2 oatcakes with low-fat spreadable cheese**
- *** Sliced boiled egg on rye crispbread**
- *** Plain nuts and seeds sprinkled on Greek yogurt**
- *** Houmous with carrot and celery sticks**
- *** Sliced ham on one piece of wholemeal bread**
- *** Feta cheese on 2-3 cheese biscuits**
- *** Handful of plain nuts with a protein shake**



DAY ON A PLATE

Try having these simple, stress-busting meals...

BREAKFAST

***Oat bircher muesli (top with grated apple or dried fruit) OR Sliced boiled eggs and avocado on wholegrain toast**

LUNCH

***Chicken and quinoa salad OR Tuna salad wholemeal wrap**

DINNER

***Mixed bean vegetarian chilli with brown rice OR Grilled salmon with sweet potato and green vegetables**

PHOTOS GETTY IMAGES

ANXIETY: Spot

Millions of us are experiencing anxiety, but don't even know it. We reveal the hidden signals and what you can do to help

Your heart is racing, you're short of breath, your body is bathed in a sheen of sweat. Anxiety affects everyone at some point in their lives. A recent Psychiatric Morbidity Survey revealed that three million people in the UK have an anxiety disorder. 'Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid,' says Nicky Lidbetter, CEO of Anxiety UK. Nicky explains it can be caused by a number of factors, including the following – your feelings of uncertainty, physical health problems, stress and your childhood experiences. Although clammy hands and a pounding heart could signal anxiety, some signs are less obvious. Here we reveal the more subtle symptoms to look out for...

AFRAID TO TAKE RISKS

Sticking to your normal "comfort zone" routine means you won't have to face embarrassment, disappointment, anger, sadness or frustration – all extreme feelings for someone with anxiety. 'When we're anxious we want to protect ourselves and can see risks as threats, so we become risk averse,' says Nicky.

NOT WILLING TO MAKE FRIENDS

Meeting new people and opening yourself up emotionally can make you feel vulnerable and exposed. You may already be imagining losing that friendship before it's even started. 'Anxiety may isolate us by way of protecting ourselves from unknown territory,' says Nicky.

FEELING UNWELL

(Including frequent headaches and nausea)

Constant anxiety has a big effect on the immune system. And trying to hide symptoms from others can impact our physical health too. 'Anxiety can make us fatigued and even sick. Plus, adrenaline released can have a negative impact on our stomachs, as well as other parts of the body,' explains Nicky.

OVERTHINKING

'When you're anxious you're desperately trying to make sense of a situation. Overthinking and labouring over every eventuality can be a way of protecting yourself and gaining control,' explains Nicky.

OVER-DRAMATISING SMALL FAILURES

'There's a catastrophising nature to anxiety that makes you perceive things being much worse than they actually are,' says Nicky. If you're overdramatic, you may have an over-the-top reaction to a small failing, which could lead to a massive meltdown or cause you to stay at home for the next few days, unable to go out and face the world.

INSOMNIA

When we're in an anxious state, it can be hard for our body and mind to relax, and we can have trouble sleeping, which can lead to bouts of insomnia.

Words Georgina Maric **Photos** Getty Images

the secret signs

TALKING TOO MUCH

You may be in a "high functioning" state when you're anxious, meaning your mind is going at 100mph. As a result, your actions – such as talking a lot – may follow suit.

DISTRACTED AND SPACED OUT

'When we're anxious we may be preoccupied with our thoughts and easily distracted,' says Nicky. Experiencing racing thoughts is common when living with anxiety, but this attention to the "inner dialogue" can result in others perceiving us as distant.

CRITICAL OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS

'Being anxious leads to you being hard on yourself. It thrives on the lack of self-esteem you have for yourself and, as a result, you become self-critical and critical of those around you,' says Nicky.

TAKE CONTROL

'If you're feeling anxious there are ways you can step back and take control before the symptoms build up and take over,' says Nicky.

BREATHING EXERCISES

Breathe in through the nose for three seconds, hold for four seconds, breathe out through the mouth slowly for five seconds.

DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES

Try the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 technique – acknowledge 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, and finally give 1 deep breath in and out.

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Tell yourself, 'I am safe, I am in control, this feeling is anxiety', and repeat until you feel more in control of your feelings.

DIETARY CHANGES

Small changes to your diet can make a difference to anxiety symptoms. Try eating less processed food, drinking less alcohol, and cutting back or stopping caffeine. Don't forget that caffeine can be present in chocolate and soft drinks, too.

GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP

Maintain a regular sleeping pattern by hitting the hay at the same time each night, switching off screens at least an hour before bed, and ensuring your bedroom is dark and the right temperature.

When it's more serious...

Seek additional help and support if anxiety is disrupting your day-to-day life and stopping you from doing activities you previously enjoyed.

» For help go to Anxiety UK, anxietyuk.org.uk, or call 03444 775 774 if you're in the UK.

BREAK FREE FROM ANXIETY

Ready to conquer the hold anxiety has over your life? Here's how…

Most people will experiences anxiety at some point in their life. In fact, mixed anxiety and depression is the most common mental disorder in Britain, affecting around one in seven of us, says mental health charity No Panic. And women are almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders as men. But it's when this feeling of unease, worry or fear begins to dominate our lives that it's important to take action.

'It's normal for people to feel anxious, but nervousness can become extreme, with psychological symptoms including feelings that you are going to die, lose control or faint,' explains Dr Dimitrios Paschos, consultant psychiatrist at recognitionhealth.com. 'Physical symptoms include tingling in the hands and feet, dizziness, breathing difficulty, nausea and perspiration.' The reaction happens as we perceive a threat and our body responds with a rush of cortisol. 'Anxiety is different from stress, as stress is a response to a specific trigger. When the stressor – such as financial pressures or relationship issues – is removed, so is the stress. With anxiety, symptoms persist and sometimes the stressor isn't identifiable,' says Dr Paschos.

WHAT'S YOUR TRIGGER?

'Anxiety isn't a new problem – the sources of stress are just different for every decade, whether it was living through war back in the 1940s or Brexit now. Uncertainty and lack of control are key factors,' explains Professor Cary Cooper, a clinical advisor to Anxiety UK. 'What's different today is that we lack the social support of family living nearby and a close community of neighbours and friends, so we have no one to help us talk out our fears.'

Stressful events, such as divorce, bereavement and redundancy, are also triggers, while a traumatic experience, such as an accident, may cause post-traumatic stress disorder, leaving someone feeling nervous and anxious for years.

'People who are self-analysing or perfectionists may be more prone to negative thoughts, and a long-term health condition or history of drug or alcohol abuse are also risk factors,' says Dr Siegfried Kasper, Professor of Psychiatry at the Medical University of Vienna.

WHY IT CAN HIT AT MIDLIFE

Anxiety can happen at any age, but midlife has a unique collection of potential triggers. 'It's a time when our kids leave home and we may need to recalibrate our identity,' says Professor Cooper. 'We might be worried about ageing or our marriage. Plus, there can be uncertainty around finances and security in our retirement.' We can also find ourselves in a caring role or sandwiched between the needs of our children and parents. According to Anxiety UK, 78% of Brits feel more anxious as a result of becoming a carer.

Stressful events, such as divorce, bereavement and redundancy, are triggers

3 STAGES OF ANXIETY

'We get anxious when pressure exceeds our ability to cope,' says Professor Cooper. Here's how to spot the signs…

STAGE 1 WITHDRAWAL
We can't face socialising, and family and friends might comment that we're not ourselves.

STAGE 2 HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE
We might drink or smoke more, and turn to comfort foods. Headaches and insomnia could be a problem.

STAGE 3 IRRATIONAL ANXIETY
When fears take over; we might become phobic about leaving the house, for example.

MENOPAUSE MAKES IT WORSE

'It might be mild anxiety before a flush or a full-on panic attack, but 65% of the women I've surveyed said they felt more anxious at this time,' says menopause expert Maryon Stewart (maryonstewart.com). 'But if we can get to a point where we are no longer overwhelmed with anxiety and other menopausal symptoms, then

'I booked on to a mindfulness course'

Fran McElwaine, 61, from Surrey, retrained as a functional health and lifestyle coach after finding a solution for her anxiety.

'Five years ago, I sat at my kitchen table in floods of tears. I was trying to write Christmas cards but my inner voice was asking why anyone would want a card from me, and flaring up the underlying anxiety that I wasn't good enough to be anyone's friend.

As I became aware of the internal narrative taking over my life, I was shocked. I knew things needed to change. As a first step, I booked on to an eight-week mindfulness course. Eventually I made the connection between my breathing and how I felt emotionally. I'd been hyperventilating my entire adult life.

My previous job was in communications, which is ironic as my anxiety was based around fear of other people. I'd put up a good front, but inside I was completely bent out of shape.

Learning to breathe was just the first step to my recovery. By springtime I decided to give up gluten and dairy for Lent. It was like walking from day to night – the constant anxiety and brain fog was lifted. I wanted to understand why what I ate had such an effect, so I studied nutrition, functional medicine and behavioural change. I qualified as a health coach in 2015.

For me, it turns out my anxiety is caused by a biochemical process; if I have gluten, I literally fall off the cliff

again. Of course, there are lots of causes of anxiety and people are dealing with deep emotional and psychological stresses, but I truly believe that if our body feels safe and healthy, then we're better able to deal with any other issues.'

Fran is a director of the UK Health Coaches Association; franmac.co.uk

The gut is known as the "second brain" as it has an effect on the wellbeing of our body

REDUCE YOUR ANXIETY

Simple lifestyle changes may help. Dr Paschos recommends...

+ **REDUCE STIMULANTS** Cut back on alcohol and caffeine, which increase stress. Water and herbal teas will enable your body to cope better with anxiety.

+ **GET ACTIVE** Exercise helps to metabolise the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol, and restore calm in the body.

+ **TACKLE POOR SLEEP** Sleep deprivation or interruption can increase stress levels.

+ **TRY MEDITATION** This is a great way to clear the brain. It also reduces the level of cortisol.

+ **SEE FRIENDS** Socialising helps to reduce anxiety and depression, and improve mental sharpness.

we can look forward to a new stage of life.'

This could be made worse as many women enter the menopause with their nutrients depleted by stress, dieting and ill health, so the first step could be to boost them with a balanced diet – this will help normalise hormonal function and help us feel calmer. Replenishing our diminishing oestrogen levels with natural oestrogen from plant foods, such as soya, linseeds and red clover supplements can also help.

'It tricks the brain, so it stops sending out thermal surges in an attempt to "wake up" our ovaries so they start producing oestrogen again,' says Maryon. With fewer flushes, anxious feelings are less likely to be triggered.

TAME TUMMY "BUTTERFLIES"

What we eat may affect anxiety in other ways, too. 'The gut is known as the "second brain", as it has a profound effect on the functioning and wellbeing of our body,' says Dr Eileen Murphy, a specialist in the microbiome and gastrointestinal health. 'The gut produces 90% of our body's serotonin, which boosts feelings of happiness. The production of the stress hormone cortisol is also modulated by the microbiome, so if we can improve the levels of healthy bacteria in our gut, it may have a positive effect on our stress response.' There's evidence that omega-3 fatty acids, fibre, probiotics and prebiotics can all help.

WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

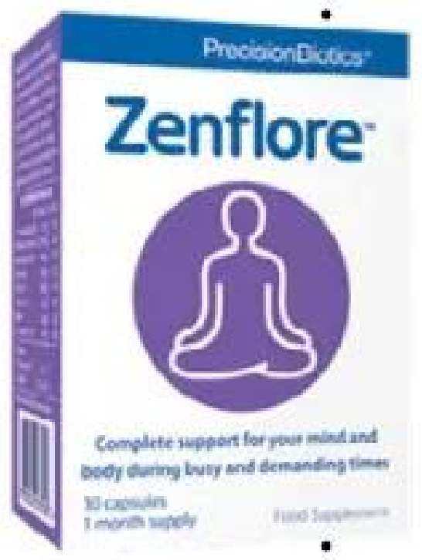
If you feel your anxiety levels are unmanageable, seek help. Your doctor may be able to prescribe medication or refer you for counselling. 'Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can alleviate feelings of anxiety and panic, and help change how you think and act,' says David Baldwin, a professor of psychiatry, who works with AXA PPP healthcare. Antidepressants may also be prescribed for people with anxiety. 'If psychological therapies are combined with antidepressants, 85% of patients respond,' he says.

For more info, go to anxietyuk.org.uk.

SOOTHING SUPPLEMENTS

+ **Kalms Lavender One-A-Day Capsules (Boots)** A daily capsule can reduce physical and psychological symptoms after two weeks.

+ **Zenflore (precisionbiotics.com)** Contains a bacterial culture that reduces the level of stress hormone, cortisol.



+ **Promensil Original Red Clover Isoflavones (Holland & Barrett)** Contains plant oestrogens that may reduce anxiety.

'My panic attacks happened everywhere'

Nikki Blisset, 39, from Newbury. 'I've always been an anxious person, but I began to suffer severe symptoms when my first son was born. It was a traumatic birth and afterwards, I experienced severe postnatal depression, which meant even leaving the house became a mission. The first time I had a panic attack, I was in the supermarket. The noise, lights and people – it all became overwhelming. Soon the attacks began to happen everywhere.

The depression and anxiety took over and I was hospitalised. I had CBT, which helped and gave me strategies to cope. The anxiety gradually subsided but recently I've been having a difficult time – I've had another baby and I was made redundant. The symptoms returned and I've been diagnosed with generalised anxiety disorder.

I'm learning how to cope better, so it's less likely to reach crisis point. I can't meditate because my mind is too active but being in nature helps – I walk the dog. To calm my heart rate, I'll close my eyes and take a few deep breaths. And I've started a blog about my experiences, which helps to get my feelings out so they don't overpower me. I'm learning to own the butterfly feeling in my stomach.'

Read Nikki's mental health blog at digitalbutterfly.life

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY IMAGES

Eat to beat... ANXIETY

Ease your mind with these soothing recipes

The latest research suggests there is a real link between what we eat and how we feel. 'Several studies have suggested that a diet based on vegetables, fruits, wholegrains and fish, with a little red meat, is useful for mental health issues,' explains nutritionist Keri Filtness.

The good bacteria in our gut are said to have a potential influence on the brain. 'Our mental health is linked to the gut via the gut-brain axis. Addressing the health of our gut is essential for conditions like anxiety,' says Catherine Rogers, founder of ryghealth.com and author of *Gut Well Soon*. These recipes will help you incorporate foods that not only taste delicious but will help boost your wellbeing too!

Quinoa and asparagus tabbouleh

Quinoa is a good source of magnesium and B vitamins. 'These are needed to produce anti-anxiety brain chemicals such as GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid),' says Wild Nutrition founder Henrietta Norton. 'Use quinoa as an alternative to rice or wheat pasta for managing anxiety and stress.'

Serves 4 • Takes 35 mins

200g quinoa
2 bunches of chopped asparagus
200g chopped kale
½ bunch chopped spring onions
1 pack of chopped parsley
A handful of sliced radishes
2tbsp olive oil
2tbsp lemon juice
200g pomegranate seeds

1 Cook the quinoa in 350ml water in a pan, covered with a lid, for 15 mins. In a separate pan, simmer the asparagus for 2 mins, then set aside.
2 Add kale to boiling water, cook for 2 mins, then rinse under cold water and drain. Add kale, spring onions, parsley, radishes, asparagus and the quinoa to a large bowl.
3 Add the olive oil and lemon juice, and season well. Scatter over pomegranate seeds and serve.

Per serving: 300 calories, 10g fat (1.3 sat fat), 36g carbs.

Salmon Provençale with freekeh

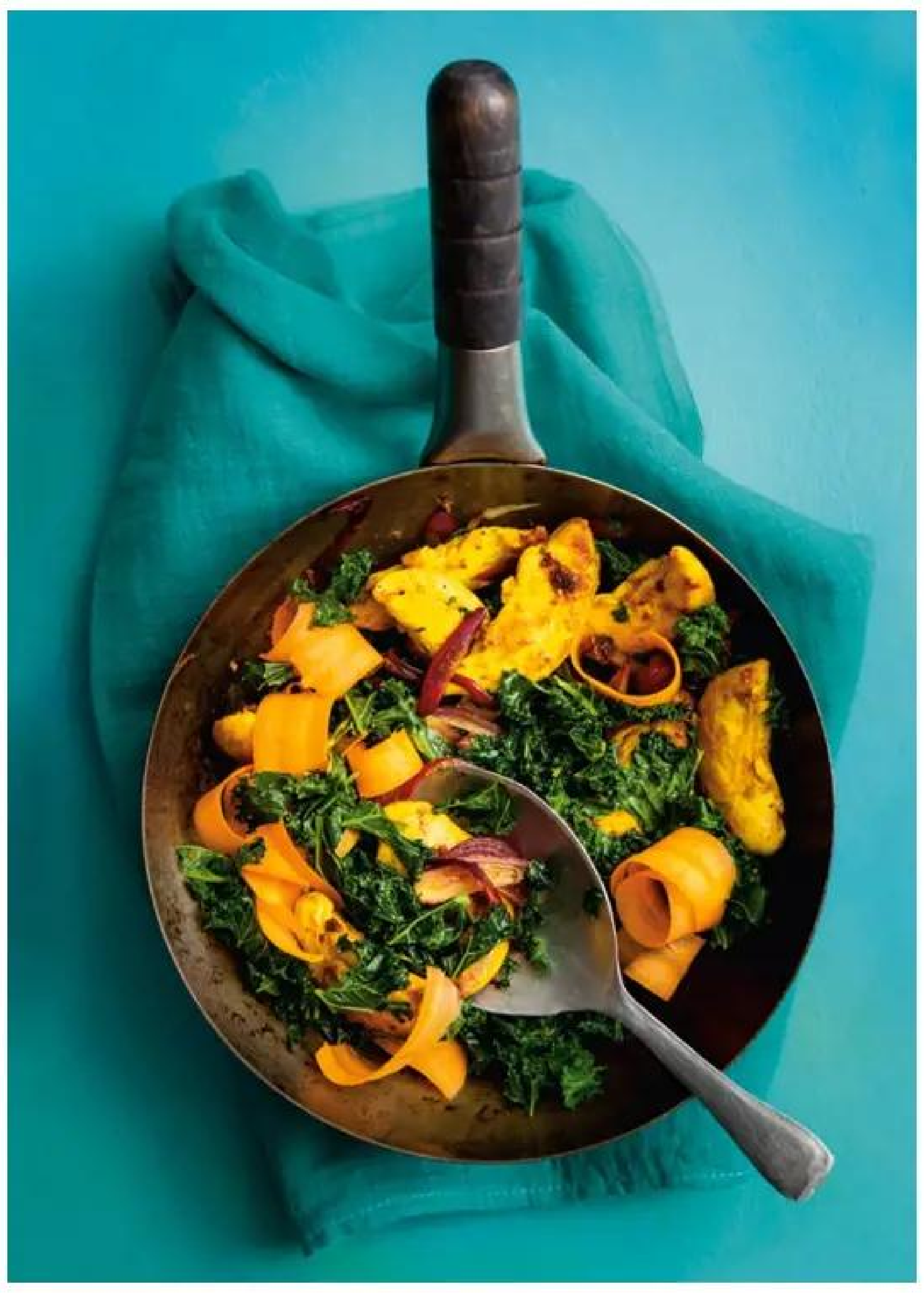
Research has shown that omega-3 rich fatty fish such as salmon have a strong relationship with mental health, with one study* finding that those whose diet lacked omega-3 increased their risk of developing mood disorders, such as anxiety.

Serves 4 • Takes 30 mins

4 x 100g pieces salmon fillet
250g mixed tomatoes, larger ones quartered
2 garlic cloves, sliced
50g mixed pitted olives
12 caper berries
1 lemon, sliced plus the juice of 1 lemon
100ml dry white wine
2 x 250g pouches cooked freekeh (such as Merchant Gourmet)
Large handful mixed fresh herbs (parsley, coriander and basil), finely chopped

1 Heat oven to 200°C, Gas 6. Cut 4x22cm diameter circles of baking paper. Place a piece of salmon on one half of each circle. Add tomatoes, garlic, olives and carper berries, season and top with lemon slices.
2 Fold and twist edges of each circle to seal. Place on a baking tray and pour wine into each parcel before sealing completely. Bake in oven for 15 mins until salmon is cooked.
3 Heat freekeh following pack instructions. Add herbs and lemon juice and stir. Serve with the salmon.

Per serving: 450 calories, 16g fat (3g sat fat), 38g carbs.



Chicken and kale stir fry

Studies** have found that turmeric's active ingredient, curcumin, seems to elevate neurotransmitters such as serotonin, whilst lowering stress hormones such as cortisol.

Serves 4 • Takes 25 mins

425g mini chicken breast fillets
2.5cm root ginger, peeled, grated
2 garlic cloves, grated
1 lemon, grated zest and juice
2tbsp rapeseed oil
¼tsp turmeric
2 red onions, sliced
250g curly kale, chopped
1tbsp miso paste
2 carrots, peeled

1 Put chicken into a shallow dish and season. Sprinkle over ginger, garlic and lemon zest. Squeeze on the lemon juice and stir to mix evenly.
2 Heat oil in a wok and cook the chicken, for 3 mins without stirring. Sprinkle over the turmeric, then turn chicken and cook for 3 more mins.
3 Push chicken to the side and add onions. Cook for 3 mins. Add the kale. Stir miso into 200ml boiling water and add, cover and cook for 3 mins.
4 Drag a vegetable peeler along the carrots to create ribbons. Add to the wok for 2 mins. Serve with quinoa.

Per serving 226 cals, 8g fat, (0.9g sat fat), 9g carbs.

PHOTOS: CHRIS ALACK, EATPICTURES.COM. *NUTRIENTS, **JOURNAL OF AFFECTIVE DISORDERS

FEELING *overstretched?*

Emotional overload hits us all at some point, but there are some simple tactics to help you cope

Have you been feeling mentally drained, weepy, anxious or extra sensitive lately? It could be that your emotions are getting the better of you. Perhaps you're worried about a family member, your job or your relationship, or fed up with what's happening in the world right now. You most certainly are not alone.

'Emotional overload is a state where you feel overwhelmed by your feelings,' says psychotherapist and sensitivity expert Julie Bjelland. 'It's normal to feel like this occasionally, especially if you've got a lot going on.'

But, what do you do if you've got a tendency to feel intense emotions, even if there's no obvious reason?

'About 20% of people are naturally very highly sensitive,' says Bjelland. 'Their brains are wired differently and this trait makes them much more susceptible to stress, anxiety and overwhelming emotions. They can read body language and micro expressions other people aren't even aware of. They feel their own emotions and those of other people more deeply.' She adds that studies show there is greater activity in the areas of the brain associated with empathy, and social and emotional processing in highly sensitive people.

> 'They can read body language and micro expressions other people aren't even aware of'

'You'll often find them in the caring professions. They can also make great leaders, healers, artists and innovators. In fact, being so sensitive is like having a super power.

'It means you're highly attuned to what's happening around you. This gives you access to information other people simply don't have.'

However, this sensitivity can also be challenging as you pick up and absorb other people's moods and emotions as if they were your own.

'You can instantly weigh up situations and how people are feeling but the downside is you can easily feel emotionally overwhelmed. So, you're more likely to feel anxious and stressed and this can have repercussions on your mental and physical health.'

8 WAYS TO MANAGE EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD

1 The 4:2:7 breathing exercise

'If you're feeling emotionally overwhelmed, try this simple breathing exercise,' says Bjelland. 'It reduces your heart rate and slows your breathing, so you feel calmer.'

+ Breathe in, deeply and slowly, for a count of four.
+ Hold your breath for a count of two.
+ Exhale for a count of seven.
+ Repeat five to seven times.

2 Emotional check

Bjelland recommends doing these three steps regularly to help you process your emotions.

STEP 1 Name what you're feeling – such as anger, sadness, fear, irritation.

STEP 2 Place your hand over your heart, breathing slowly and deeply into your heart centre. This activates receptors that help you feel calmer.

STEP 3 Ask yourself what you need right now. Maybe you need to take a break, go for a walk, talk to a friend.

3 Keep a journal

'Make a note of situations and how they make you feel,' says Bjelland. 'Writing things down can help to clarify and process your thoughts, alleviating anxiety. It makes it easier to identify emotional triggers, releases negative thoughts and feelings, and calms the mind. Writing activates the rational left side of your brain and helps to switch the focus away from your emotional (right side).' Research* shows that "expressive writing" has similar benefits to other psychological therapies.

4 Nature therapy

Spending time in nature is incredibly restorative and soothing for the nervous system. Research shows that being in a green natural environment causes your brain waves, heart rate and breathing to slow down. Plus, blood pressure drops and this helps you to feel calmer and less stressed. In a recent US study** it was shown that spending at least 20-30 minutes in greenery significantly lowers the stress hormone cortisol.

5 Time to recharge

'If you're a highly sensitive person naturally, it's really beneficial to have at least two hours a day and one day a week of unstructured time,' says Bjelland. 'This means switching off from the news and social media, and taking time out to recharge whether it be walking, listening to a podcast or reading. This is also helpful if you're going through a turbulent time, as it allows you to process your emotions.'

6 Identify energy drainers

'Whenever possible, eliminate drainers,' says energy psychotherapist, Judith Orloff. 'Spending time with people who drain you disturbs your emotional equilibrium.' You've met a drainer if:

+ Your eyelids feel heavy and you suddenly feel tired.
+ You feel put down and deflated.
+ Your mood takes a nose dive.
+ You have an urge to comfort eat or drink too much.
+ You feel uncomfortable or agitated.

If it's someone you can't (or don't want to avoid), follow these tips:

+ Take a deep breath.
+ Stay calm and matter of fact.
+ Pause before you react.
+ Show compassion while maintaining your boundaries.

7 Trust your gut

'Your gut tells you what's going on in most situations,' says Dr Christiane Northrup, author of *Dodging Energy Vampires* (Hay House). 'If your first reaction is anger, for example, you need to trust that. Remember that anger is simply a sign that a need isn't being fulfilled. Start paying attention to what your gut says and then follow that feeling.'

8 Look after your physical health

Bjelland recommends exercise regularly to discharge excess stress hormones. She also advocates mindful eating, as healthy choices will help to nourish the body. They can also help you sleep, and lack of sleep will make emotional overload worse. Aim for seven to eight hours each night.

WORDS: EVA GIZOWSKA. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES. *ADVANCES IN PSYCHIATRIC TREATMENT, 2005 **(FRONTIERS IN PSYCHOLOGY, 2019)

Unpack your EMOTIONAL BACKPACK

It's not always easy to recognise that we're overloaded but knowing what's weighing you down is the key to a lighter, happier life

We all have times when we struggle to prioritise our emotional needs, and it can leave us physically and emotionally exhausted, unable to sleep well and feeling irritable. It's what trauma expert Dr Eric Gentry calls "compassion fatigue" – a sign that our internal emotional backpack is overflowing because we're struggling to prioritise our own emotional needs.

The level of compassion fatigue a person experiences changes from one day to the next. Even very healthy people with optimal life/work balance and self-care strategies can experience it when they're overloaded. Life events such as divorce, death, illness or simply reaching midlife can trigger and accelerate compassion fatigue, especially if you don't have anyone or anywhere to express your feelings.

An exercise called "unpacking your emotional backpack" is a helpful way to prevent compassion fatigue. It enables you to have difficult conversations without experiencing a strong emotional reaction of fear, shock, anger or worry because you remember something bad that has happened in your past. By not being "triggered" in this way, you'll find you enjoy happier, more connected relationships with yourself and your family. The aim is to be happier, reflective rather than reactive, and able to nurture understanding, positivity and joy in your relationships. You will feel lighter in mind and heart, have more energy, be more accessible to your family, stay even-tempered and make clearer decisions.

OUR EXPERT

AMANDA SEYDERHELM is a play and creative arts therapist who enables children and families to make sense of their feelings through play. She teaches professionals and parents how to unpack their emotional backpacks and is a Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children Ambassador. She has also written *Helping Children Cope with Loss and Change: A guide for Professionals and Parents* (Routledge 2019).

WORDS: AMANDA SEYDERHELM.
PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

1 UNTANGLE YOUR FEELINGS

Adults tend to overanalyse a problem (left-brain thinking), which means they can become detached from their emotions (right-brain feeling). We need both right and left sides to be talking to each other to function optimally. If the problem is emotional, rational left-brain thinking won't solve it. We need to use a creative playful medium like drawing to unlock the tangle of our feelings and make sense of them. When adults get to "play out" their issues through creative mediums like art and writing, it helps them articulate their understanding verbally.

✣ **TRY THIS** A creative check-in like drawing connects you to your right brain. Ring-fence 30 minutes for yourself before you leave the house – with practice, you will do this in 15 and stop the world to do it! Fill a small box with coloured crayons and get a sheet of A4 plain paper. Sit quietly, phone off. Ask yourself: how am I feeling right now? Select crayon colours intuitively and draw a picture that represents your feeling. No critique, this isn't about art perfection. Reflect on your drawing and select one word that represents your feeling. Write the word on the drawing. You are meeting yourself on the page. Simply acknowledge whatever shows up.

2 COMMUNICATE COMPASSIONATELY

Constructive communication needs a compassionate heart. Words can lead to hurt and pain, so it helps to replace patterns of defending or attacking with compassion. A four-step method for learning this sort of "non-violent communication" was devised by the American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg. You can access your compassion by completing a sequence of four statements.

✣ **TRY THIS** Select a recent conversation that upset you and write out your answers:

1 When I remember a recent upsetting conversation (describe this conversation).
2 I feel these emotions (identify emotions).
3 What I really need and value is (say what you need and value).
4 My request of you is (say what you request from the other person).

Here's an example of a completed sequence: When I argue with my partner, I **FEEL** upset and distressed, because I **NEED** and **VALUE** calmness in my life. Would you be willing to **TELL ME** what is upsetting you so we can work out a solution that means we are both heard?

The bold type highlights the "states of mind" you go through on this journey, which end with you making a request of the other person. Note, you are never blaming them for your feelings, nor are you seeking to change them. What you are doing is sharing your feelings, telling them what you need and asking them if they are willing to engage with you in creating change together. The more you practise this exercise, the more powerful the results will be.

3 GET TO KNOW YOURSELF

Writing your "authentic self" story can help you to "find your voice", understand who you truly are, and address the negative chit-chat inside your head. It helps to unlock psychophysical suffering by showing you what you've internalised, such as scripts you may have inherited from your parents. These affect your outlook and your decision-making, so becoming self-aware helps you understand why your buttons can get pressed, and you will find empathic engagement with yourself and with others. For example, you won't fly off the handle about something that isn't terribly important like untidiness because you'll recognise you inherited an intolerance of mess from your parents.

✣ **TRY THIS** Select three small objects from your home or garden. Spend five minutes looking at each object and notice how you feel. Write, "Once upon a time, there was an object called ". Name your object and write its story. No editing, just write until you have completed one side of A4. Read the story aloud. Where does this resonate in your body? Is it your story or someone else's?

4 EVALUATE SELF-CARE

Do you have a good sense of how your body communicates to you when it is stressed and overwhelmed? Recognising the physical symptoms of compassion fatigue will help you to reflect on the causes and open the door to finding solutions.

✣ **TRY THIS** If, for example, you feel a "tightness" in your throat, draw a picture of your throat. Focus on whichever body part is carrying stress. This builds awareness between you and your body.

5 SEEK HELP

If you still feel you need help and you're in the UK, the NHS offers free counselling sessions (usually up to six) through a GP referral, usually for anxiety-related issues. You can also find a therapist through the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. *Unpacking your Backpack* for adults is available as a digital programme at amandaseyderhelm.com. It costs £47 ($64) to download and will guide you through exercises, with videos that will help to support development.

DOES YOUR BRAIN NEED A DECLUTTER?

Forget the bathroom cabinet, there's something else in need of a clearout…

You can't fold a jumper without hearing about the apparently life-changing "home-tidy" Marie Kondo method. But what if there was something more in need of a declutter than our overspilling sock drawer? Just like our homes, our brains aren't a pretty sight when they're clogged up with too much bric-a-brac. So it's important to do a regular brain blitz and clear out our grey matter. Here's how…

Information overload

Our brains are a feat of nature. Incredibly, they can store as much information as the entire Internet. 'We live in an age where there is just so much content available to us at a click of a button,' says mindset and business coach Irene Moore (**irenemoore.com**). As our inboxes are filling up with endless newsletter sign-ups and notifications, so too are our minds. This overload of information can make us feel overwhelmed, and many of us are also making too many commitments. Researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that each stressful incident could age our brain by one-and-a-half years. So, unwinding is an important step in the decluttering process.

HOW TO DO IT

1 SWAP BUSY FOR BREATHE

Using words like "stressed", "busy" or "hectic" can make you feel overwhelmed. Every time you think "busy", swap that word for "breathe" – then take a deep breath in and out.

2 BEDITATE IN THE MORNING

Want to tap in to your creative brainwaves today? Jumping out of bed stressed won't help. 'When you're in a stressed beta brainwave mode, you're very focused on a particular goal – great for when you know what you're doing, but not so good for problem-solving,' explains beditation creator Laurence Shorter. 'Beditating, which involves spending five minutes in bed before you get up, slows down and relaxes your brainwaves, so you move from stress-driven beta-wave mode into a more relaxed alpha-wave mode.' Try beditating for a clearer, calmer mind. Lie there and do nothing. Acknowledge the voice in your head that says you need to be doing something, but don't react. Also be mindful of your body lying on the bed. Don't worry if you struggle to feel calm, just repeat the process until you do. Once you feel relaxed, ask yourself: "What are my priorities for the day?" Don't worry if the answer doesn't come to you immediately. Hopefully, by relaxing, you'll give your brain space to think and conjure up creative solutions.

3 FEEL THE PRESSURE

Sleep is key for brain functions, including how neurons communicate. But a jam-packed brain can stop you switching off and dropping off. Try this snooze-inducing trick – rub the spot behind your ear where there's a hollow. 'It's one of the most relaxing points in the body,' says Gillian Berry, a member of the British Acupuncture Council.

4 LEARN TO SAY NO

Constantly feel under pressure to say "yes"? Your people-pleasing ways may be having a negative effect on your wellbeing. Overcommitting ourselves can cause stress levels to rise, as we agree to give time and energy we don't have, and lead us to foster resentment. Saying "no" can help you balance the demands of others, and leave you feeling happier, calmer and more in control. 'If you find it hard to say no to someone's face, tell them you'll check your diary and get back to them. Honestly explain that you'd like to help but don't want to let anyone down as you are overcommitted,' explains psychotherapist Juliet Grace.

Why is mental clutter bad?

Like that "everything" cupboard under the stairs where we chaotically stuff all our odds and sods, our brain can struggle to sort through all the rubbish and find what we actually need. 'Having a cluttered mind can be debilitating and can leave us feeling unfocused and anxious,' says Irene. 'Often we don't know where to begin, because there is so much swirling around in our brain.'

While being informed is never bad – after all, our minds are designed to think and process information – overstimulation can have a negative effect. 'Like most things, too much of anything isn't good for you,' she adds.

When we overload ourselves, instead of becoming smarter as we tackle lots of new challenges, our brain's ability to learn and problem-solve actually decreases. It can also cause us to overthink things, which can feel draining and eventually even be a cause of chronic stress. This can suppress your immune system, upset your digestive system and increase your risk of heart problems and stroke.

'When we have a clearer mind, we're able to process information effectively and make better decisions,' says clinical hypnotherapist Fiona Lamb. 'By decluttering, our mind becomes sharper – clearing the old for the new.'

TECH TIP

Bombarded with work emails after work? Put your out of office on when you leave for the day and say you'll reply when you're next at work. And then STICK TO IT!

Clear our minds

So how can we flick our filter switch and make our brains less busy?

+ DO A DIGITAL DETOX

'We're bombarded with messages, calls and never-ending notifications,' says life coach Carole Ann Rice. 'We get a dopamine thrill, so it can become addictive, but this eventually becomes toxic.' Take time away from your phone – read, go for a walk or meet a friend – and avoid taking it into the bedroom. Download the Space app (iOS/Android). It encourages mindful screen time by setting screen unlock and time use goals as well as alerting you to overuse.

+ SAY TA-TA TO TO-DOS

Endless checklists might make us feel more organised, but they're actually draining our brains. Carole Ann suggests employing her 3D concept of Do it, Dump it or Delegate it:

Do it Devote time to completing a task entirely. Be realistic about how long it will take and focus on one thing at one time.

Dump it This refers to time and tasks. Say "no" more often – it stops you becoming overloaded. Don't do something out of obligation or guilt, and ensure you leave "white space" in your diary (at least a couple of days free) that is just for you.

Delegate it Don't have time, energy or the inclination for a task? Ask for help. Do a "skills swap" – whatever you dislike doing, someone else will love.

+ SAY "NO" TO MULTITASKING

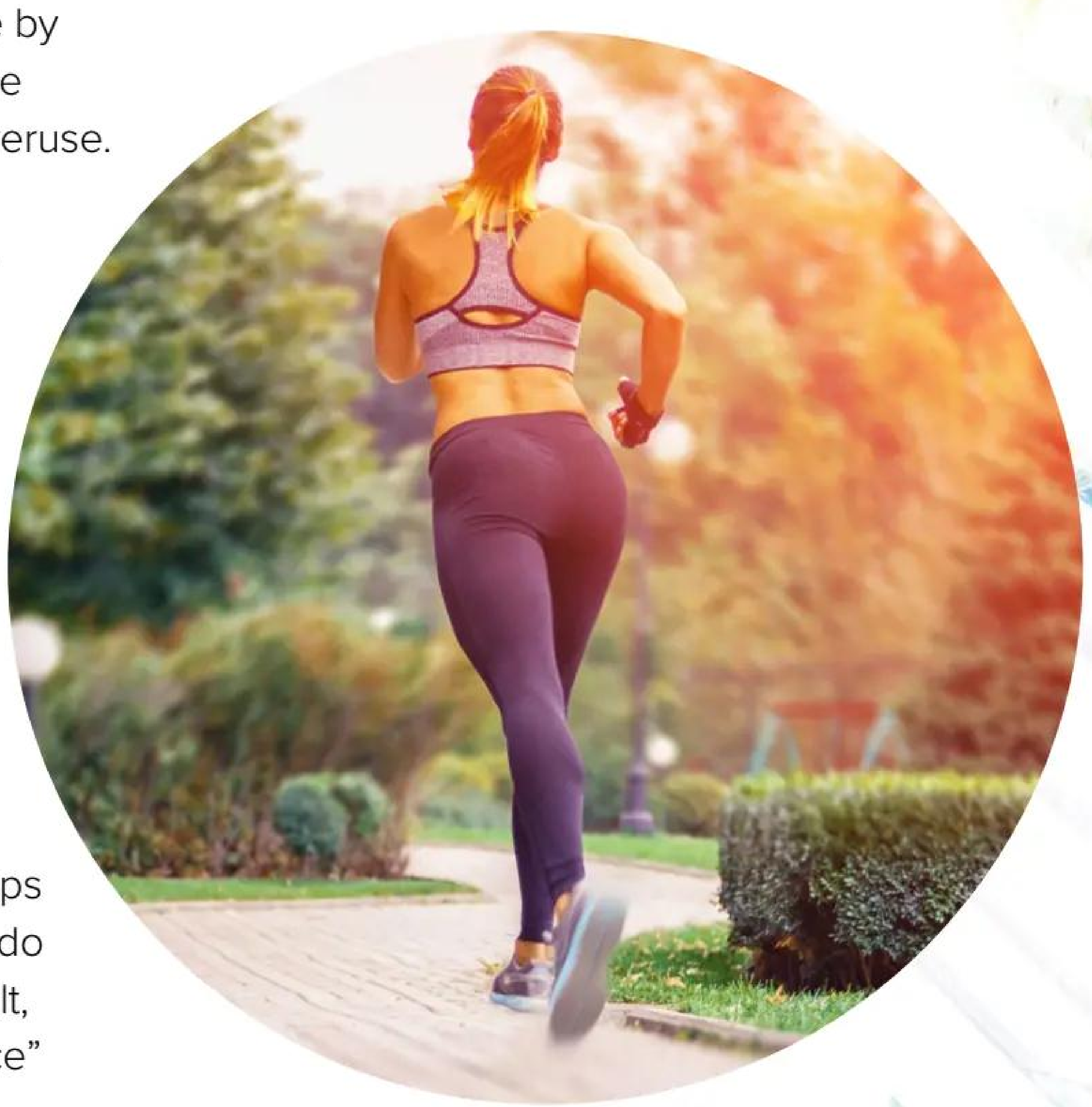
Despite popular belief, it doesn't make you more efficient. In fact, research shows that our brains are not nearly as good as we think they are at handling multiple tasks, and could even reduce productivity by 40%. Shifting your attention and focus from one thing to the next makes it difficult to tune out distractions, and can cause mental blocks that can slow you down.

+ JOURNAL FOR 5 MINUTES

Irene recommends setting out some time each day – ideally morning and night – to list all of your thoughts. 'Try and stick to the same time every day if you can so you start to create a routine for decluttering your mind,' she says. Prioritise these thoughts from 1 to 3, with number 1 being the most important. Focus on trying to complete the 1s this week.

+ GET MOVING

'Exercising boosts blood flow and releases happy hormones dopamine and serotonin,' says Fiona. 'This clears the mind and strengthens brain nerve cells.' Dancing, in particular, requires mental skills and co-ordination, which improves cognitive function and slows down ageing.



WORDS: NATALIA LUBOMIRSKI. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO
*RESEARCH BY LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY

Click yourself calm

Do you get that sinking feeling every time another email pops up on your phone? An out-of-control inbox can be enough to drive the most calm of us to our third espresso of the morning – a study by Loughborough University found that measurements of heart rate, blood pressure and the stress hormone cortisol were shown to peak at points in the day when people's inboxes were fullest. So here's how to get a handle on your inbox. All it takes is five minutes a week...

✢ DEVELOP A SCHEDULE
It takes workers a third longer to complete a task if they're interrupted by emails.* So establish a routine for when you check emails. A study by the University of British Columbia found that limiting it to three times per day has a significant impact on mental health. Think about the quietest moments in your day to block off as your email sessions.

✢ JUNK THE JUNK MAIL
An inbox constantly filling up with messages from mailing lists you signed up to years ago can make you feel out of control (and wake you up at 2am). So take five minutes to unsubscribe from all your junk mail.

✢ BE A FOLDER FAN
Filing emails into folders makes it easier to find relevant messages. Look at the first three pages of your inbox and note down recurring subject matters – these should be the names of your folders. In future, once you've dealt with an email, drop it into the relevant folder.

✢ HIT SNOOZE
If your inbox gets packed out with emails that are important but not right now, try using the "Snooze" function (available on Gmail, Outlook and more). They'll be removed from your inbox temporarily and land back in it on the day and time you state.

EAT TO BOOST...

Brain Power

Feeling overwhelmed? Support your grey matter with these recipes by dietitian Kerri Major

Chilli Con Carne

The vitamin B in beans helps us generate energy from our food and overcome feelings of lethargy. Serves 4

1 tbsp olive oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 garlic clove, crushed
1-2 red bell peppers, finely chopped
2 celery stalks, finely chopped
1-2 fresh chilli peppers, seeded and finely chopped
1 tsp cayenne pepper
1 tsp cumin
1 tsp paprika
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp dried coriander
1 tsp chilli powder
400g lean minced beef
300ml beef stock
400g tomato passata
1 tbsp tomato purée
Salt and pepper, to taste
400g tin red kidney beans, drained and rinsed
200g black beans, drained and rinsed
300g uncooked brown rice
Salt and pepper to taste

1 Put a large, deep pot over a medium heat. Add olive oil.

2 Add onion and cook for 3-5 minutes until onion is transparent.

3 Add garlic, red bell peppers, celery and fresh chilli peppers, along with cayenne pepper, cumin, paprika, cinnamon, coriander and chilli powder. Stir and leave to cook for a few minutes.

4 Turn up heat a little and add beef. Stir thoroughly and ensure mince is broken up into small pieces. Continue to cook until there are no more pink beef pieces.

5 Add 300ml beef stock and stir well.

6 Add tomato passata, salt and pepper and tomato purée.

7 Bring it to boil, reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. The mixture should be thick, moist and juicy.

8 Add kidney beans and black beans and simmer again for another 10 minutes.

9 Leave to stand in the pot for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, cook the rice as per pack instructions.

10 Serve chilli on top of rice with sprinkle of fresh chilli and yogurt, if desired.

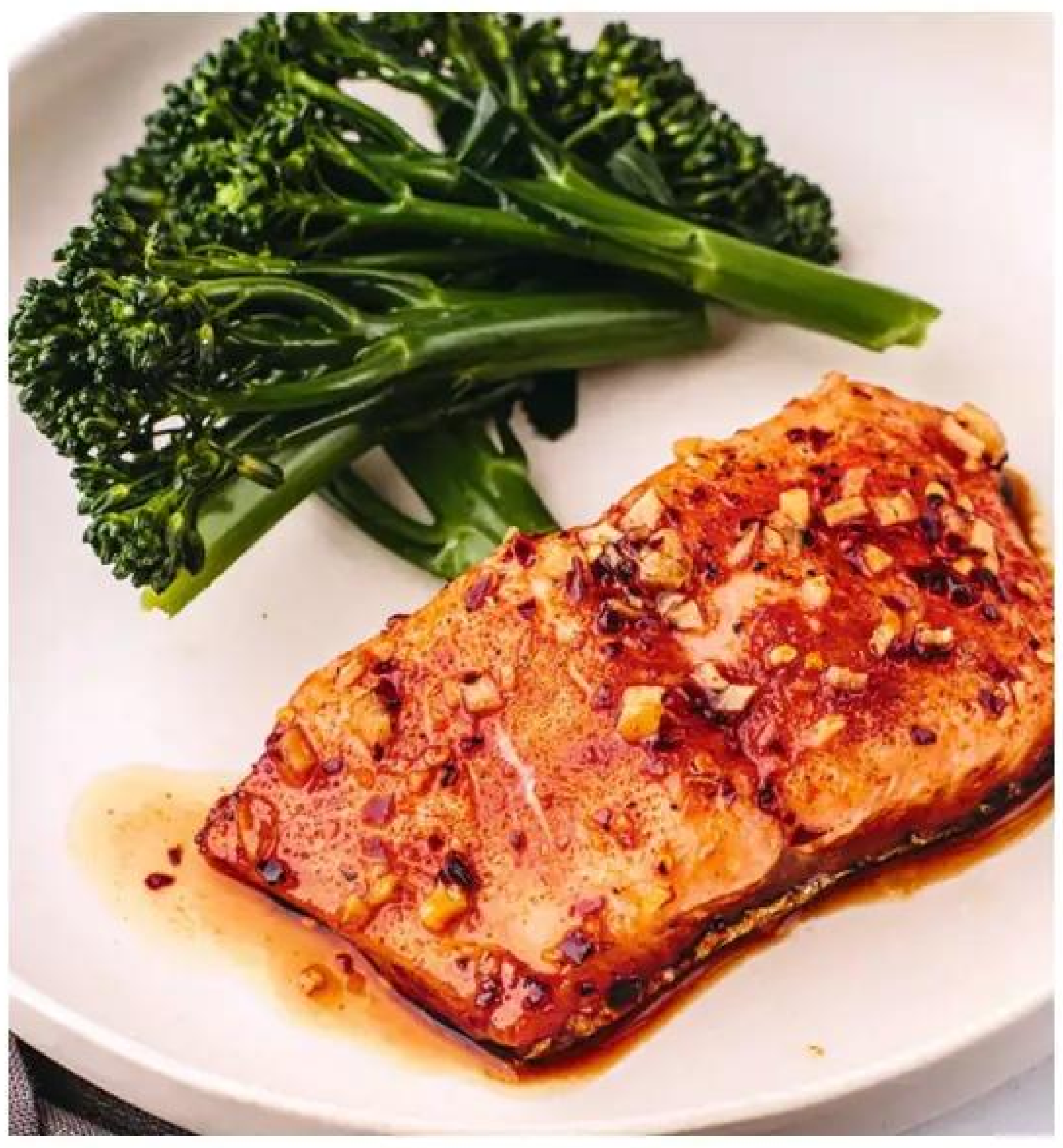
COMPILED BY: LUCY GORNALL. 'ACS' JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD CHEMISTRY

Honey, Garlic & Chilli Salmon

Research is yet to confirm it, but omega-3-packed oily fish is thought to aid brain function and mood. Serves 2

1 salmon fillet
½ tsp paprika
Salt and black pepper, to taste
1 tbsp butter
1 garlic clove, crushed
1-2 tbsp honey
½ tbsp water
1 tsp soy sauce
Juice ½ lemon
½ tsp chilli flakes

1 Preheat the grill.
2 Place the salmon on a plate and season with salt, pepper and paprika. Set aside.
3 In medium pan, melt the butter over a low heat. Add garlic and cook for 1-2 minutes, until fragrant.
4 Add honey, water, soy sauce, lemon juice, and chilli flakes and mix well.
5 Add salmon to a frying or griddle pan, skin-side down. Cook over a medium-high heat for 3-4 minutes until golden, occasionally basting the top of the fish with the sauce.
6 Place pan under the grill for 5-6 more minutes until the salmon is cooked through.
7 Season with more lemon juice if desired, and serve with potatoes or rice and your choice of vegetables.

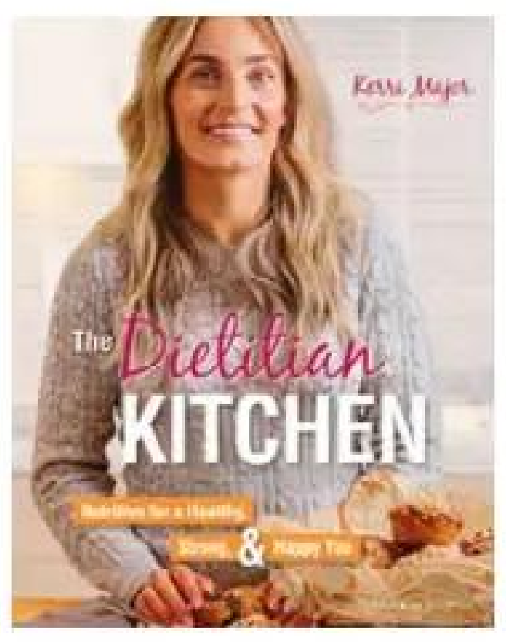


Berry Boom Smoothie

There's been evidence to suggest that eating berries could help prevent age-related memory loss, thanks to the high level of antioxidants they contain*. Serves 2

200ml milk (any kind)
1 handful spinach leaves
1 ripe banana, sliced (frozen, if possible)
40g frozen raspberries
40g frozen blueberries
40g frozen strawberries
1 tsp honey (or maple syrup)
1 tsp vanilla essence
1 tbsp low-fat Greek yogurt
½ tbsp chia seeds
Handful of ice (if desired)

In a blender, blitz everything together until smooth. Top with a berry if you like!



Kerri Major's debut book *The Dietitian Kitchen: Nutrition for a Healthy, Strong, & Happy You* (Meyer & Meyer The Sports Publisher, meyer-meyer-sport.co.uk) is available now.

Find your DREAM ROUTINE

DID YOU KNOW?

'On average, it takes 21 days to change a habit, and a little over two months for new behaviours to become automatic,' says Hope.

Set routines can be good for your health. But, while this is great news for control freaks, what if you're struggling to survive in organised chaos? Our experts help you find the right balance...

For some, the monotony of lockdown during 2020 was a struggle. If this was you, take heart from the revelation that a set routine can boost your health. 'A daily routine can help us feel more in charge of our lives and aid our mental wellbeing,' says sleep psychologist and mindfulness expert Hope Bastine, resident expert with Simba.

A lack of routine in our day can mean we feel stressed out and agitated when life becomes frantic. In fact, 85%* of Brits seek order and structure at home, saying it makes them happier.

But finding the balance between a well-planned daily schedule and living in chaos can be hard. 'Research shows that when we are too fixed and rigid, especially when it comes to a routine, it can cause us to suffer more mental health challenges,' says Hope.

Feel like your life is all up in the air? Here's how to find the perfect balance...

THE BENEFITS OF A ROUTINE

Having a routine can be one of the easiest ways to inject positivity into your life – and that's not all. 'It can sound counter-intuitive, but developing a daily routine can help us to feel more in control of everything, and help us to make room for all that's important,' says business coach Linda Davies-Carr, aka The Master Fixer (themasterfixer.com). 'Just like always brushing our teeth in the morning, following a routine allows us to create habits that match our goals and aspirations. It can help us to cope with change, to form healthy habits, sleep better and reduce our stress levels. It can also help to make us aware of – and reduce – bad habits that do not serve us well, such as procrastination.'

CHILDHOOD ROOTS

If you think about it, structure is instilled in us from birth. Babies thrive on routine, so it's no wonder adults also reap the benefits. 'A daily routine gives children a sense of security by making their everyday lives more predictable,' says Hope. 'It also helps them learn faster.' And it's the same for us adults.

WHY COPYING IS BAD

Finding your perfect routine can be slightly tricky, as what might be great for someone else may not work for you. 'Everyone's daily routine should be slightly different and based on their circadian rhythm, responsibilities and what their tasks for each day are,' says Hope.

Copying someone else could set you up for failure. 'This is critical,' says Linda. 'Someone you know on social media might get up at 5am, run a 10k before breakfast, do a downward dog, meditate and journal, all before 7am, while you're thinking about pressing "snooze" again. But her routine is not your reality – create a routine and habits that work for you to tweak as you go.'

The top rule? Don't make it too hard to follow. 'Just some semblance of structure will help,' adds Linda.

TOP 5 THINGS Brits like having control over*

1 Finances
2 Food shopping
3 Heating
4 Cooking
5 Cleaning

40%

the amount of our day that's made up of habits.**

3 SIMPLE STEPS TO CREATING A ROUTINE

'Make a list of your daily tasks, then put them in order of priority and time lines,' says Hope. 'It's important to do most of your tasks throughout the daytime so you can use up your energy levels then, and be able to get a good night's sleep at a certain time.'

Not sure where to start? 'First, do the task below,' says Linda. 'As you gain in confidence, then develop your routine further.'

She advises...

1 Sit down with a pad of paper and write out everything you do each day over the course of a week.

2 Evaluate what you can cut or reduce.

3 See what you can set as part of a normal routine – something you do at a set time each day or week.

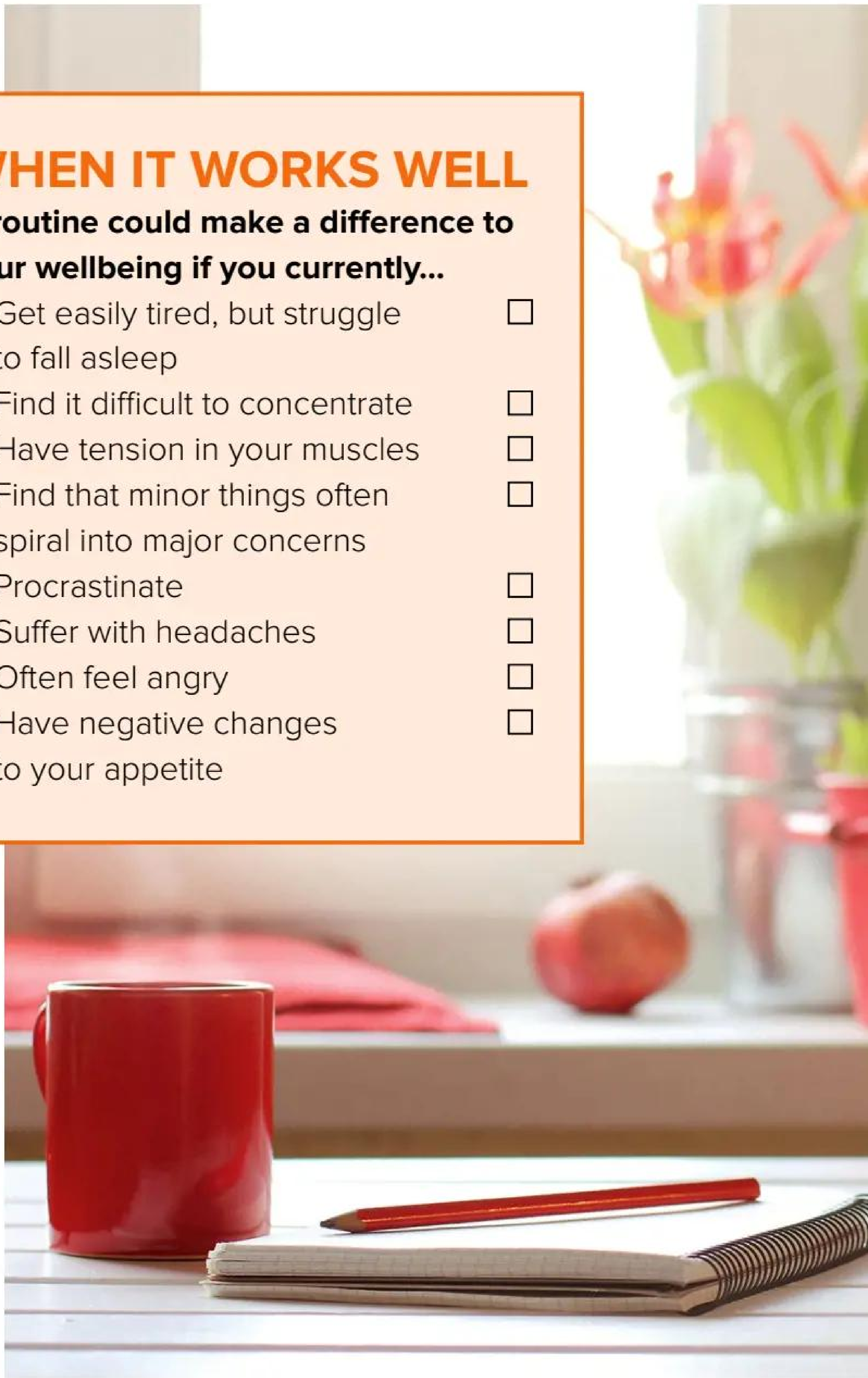
Habit stacking

Another way to make a routine that lasts is to add healthy chores onto things you already do. 'Habit stacking is adding a new habit to an existing one,' says Linda. Want to fit in more exercise? 'An example is doing your 30 push-ups straight after you finish brushing your teeth.'

WHEN IT WORKS WELL

A routine could make a difference to your wellbeing if you currently...

- Get easily tired, but struggle to fall asleep ☐
- Find it difficult to concentrate ☐
- Have tension in your muscles ☐
- Find that minor things often spiral into major concerns ☐
- Procrastinate ☐
- Suffer with headaches ☐
- Often feel angry ☐
- Have negative changes to your appetite ☐



MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

Following your new routine, but it doesn't feel quite right? It's okay to change things. 'Try out the routine for at least a month and see if it improves your stress and anxiety levels,' says Hope. 'Think about what works best for you – you could either create a flexible routine in order to harness your most productive times of the day for the tasks you need to complete or make a very strict, detailed schedule that you will stick to until it becomes natural.'

FIX YOUR SLEEP

Fixing your sleep could be the first thing to target. 'Having

a sleep routine – which means making sure your bedtimes and wake-up times are the same each day – is essential for your health and wellbeing,' says Hope. 'Going to bed early increases the likelihood of better-quality sleep. It increases your chances of getting deep sleep, which is the restorative, healing kind.' So keeping lie-ins to a minimum is essential. 'Even if you're having a lie-in one day or you would like to go to bed early, make sure it is no more than one hour each way,' adds Hope.

KEEP YOUR GOALS IN FOCUS

Repetition can also make you more efficient and proficient. 'Successful people know that the only way to accomplish their goals is by doing the same things over and over again,' says Dr Nitasha Buldeo, founder of Organic Apoteke. 'When you have a routine, you start to become better at doing certain things because you do them regularly and in a timely way. This is the key to mastering any skill. Think about something you are very good at. It is very likely that you developed your skill because you have performed the task over and over again. Practice makes perfect. Practice also leads to efficiency.'

FACTOR IN DOWNTIME

Make sure you include downtime in your daily routine. 'This means doing activities that reduce stress and support health, such as taking a walk in nature, reading, meditating or engaging in art, music or drama,' says chartered psychologist Dr Meg Arroll. 'Be realistic about what you can achieve in each day.'

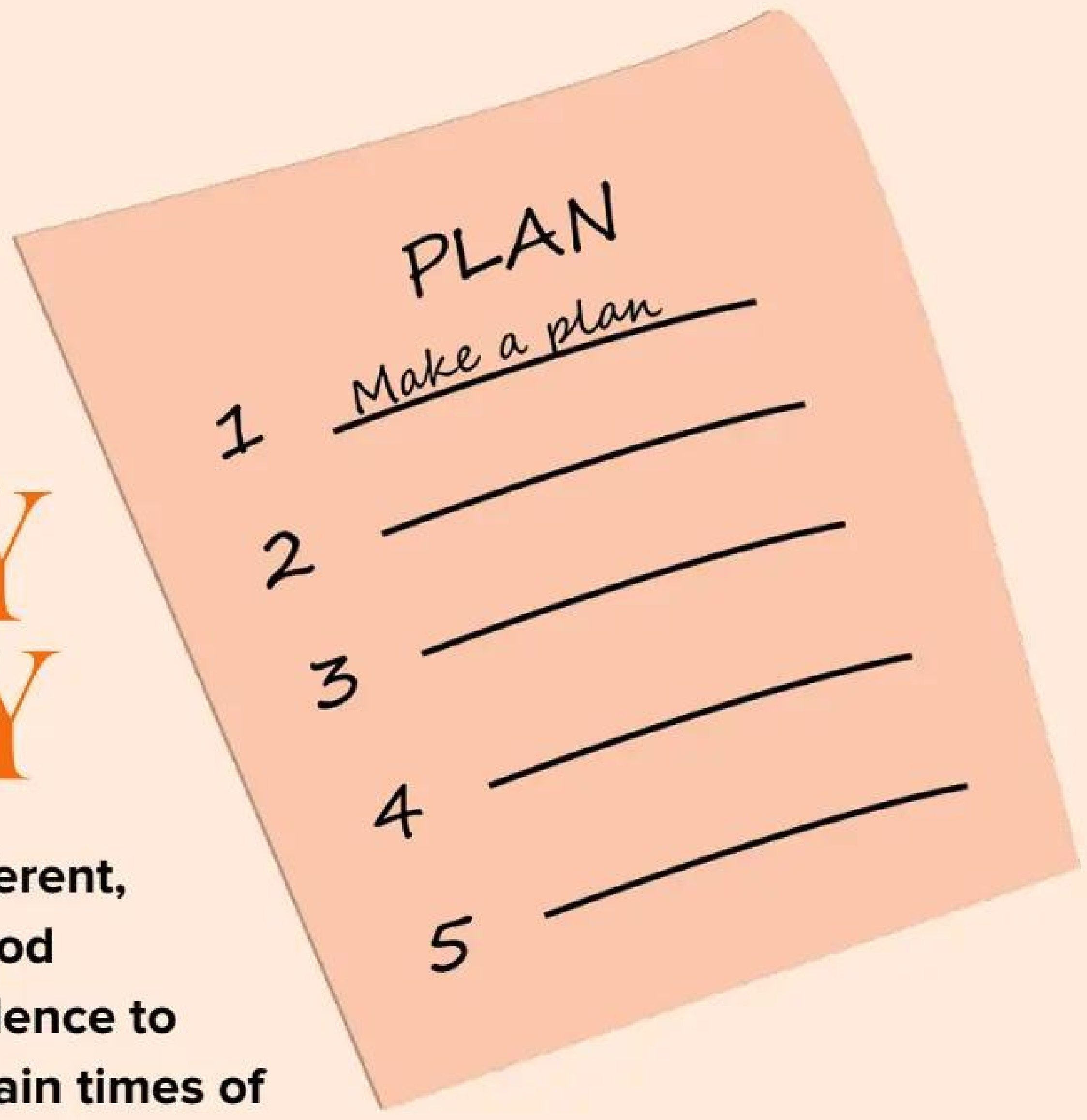
TAKE A BREAK

Planning on going away? It's okay to break your routine. 'On holiday, we grow when we stretch and challenge ourselves, and sometimes that means breaking our routine to gain a different perspective,' says Hope. 'What's important and challenging is to learn how to get back to the routine after taking a break.'

Go back to basics with your original routine and see what new changes you could make.

SIMBA SLEEP TECHNOLOGY MATTRESS FIRM. *HIVE. **2014 STUDY PUBLISHED IN SOCIETY FOR PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY. ***BRITISH JOURNAL OF NUTRITION. WORDS: FAYE M SMITH AND ALI HORSFALL. PHOTOS: GETTY, ALAMY

YOUR PERFECTLY TIMED DAY



While everyone's day will be slightly different, creating set times for things can be a good starting structure. 'There's plenty of evidence to suggest that doing certain things at certain times of the day can be better for us,' says health behaviour change specialist Dr Heather McKee. 'Adding time-based cues can help you to reach your health goals. Times act as a trigger to take action, and with daily repetition you're more likely to create long-lasting change.'

Here's how to make the most of those time cues...

☐ 6AM: WAKE UP

Scientists at Bristol University found that women who woke early had a lower risk of developing breast cancer, and other research suggests that you're less likely to suffer from depression.

☐ 7AM: BREAKFAST

Eating within 60 minutes of waking helps maintain long-term weight loss.

☐ 8AM: EXERCISE

A Seattle-based study revealed this is the optimum time of day to exercise for postmenopausal women who are struggling with insomnia.

☐ 12PM: CHECK HYDRATION LEVELS

By now it's ideal to have drunk 500ml of water to stay on track with your 1.5 litres-per-day goal, as dehydration leads to fatigue.

☐ 1PM: LUNCH

Rather than grabbing a sandwich on the go, 1pm can be your cue to punctuate the day with a nutritious meal. A study*** revealed that those who take their time and focus properly on lunch feel satisfied and eat less later in the day.

☐ 2PM: TAKE A NAP

An afternoon snooze can increase cognitive performance and lower blood pressure. Just 20-30 minutes will recharge the whole body – but set your alarm to wake you, as any longer will leave you groggy

☐ 3.30PM: EAT FOR ENERGY

A well-timed snack gives you the energy to power through the afternoon, but avoid high-sugar, fast-release foods.

☐ 6PM: HAVE DINNER

Women who ate most of their calories later than this were more likely to have high blood pressure and be overweight, found experts at Columbia University.

☐ 8PM: TAKE TIME FOR YOU

'Self-care is essential for combating stress,' says psychologist Suzy Reading. 'Sit and listen to a podcast, read a book or have a soak in the bath instead of filling free hours with chores.'

☐ 9PM: SWITCH OFF DEVICES

Ideally, turn off tech a minimum of an hour before sleep – the blue light from screens suppresses the sleep hormone melatonin.

☐ 10.30PM: HEAD TO BED

From 9pm, the body lowers its production of serotonin and increases production of melatonin to induce drowsiness, so work with this natural flow. To wake at 6am, aim to be asleep by 10.30pm.

YES? NO? MAYBE?

With so many choices to make on everything from tonight's dinner to long-term finances, is your brain a little overwhelmed?

Every day, we make a huge number of decisions, many of which we may not even notice. From choosing what to eat for dinner to opting to read this article – or even deciding subconsciously to cross your legs – it's been estimated that we make around 35,000 decisions a day. Having so many choices to make can exhaust us, leading to a phenomenon called "decision fatigue".

WHAT IS DECISION FATIGUE?

Decision-making depletes cognitive energy, so at the end of a particularly taxing day, we're more inclined to make a snap decision or to put it off entirely. This explains why we might respond to a tricky email negatively or keep procrastinating over answering it.

'Decision fatigue happens to us all but, if unchecked, it can zap our motivation, focus and willpower,' says Antoinette Dale Henderson, women's leadership expert and the author of *Power Up*.

WHY ALL THE DECISIONS?

Technology and modern life means we're constantly distracted by electronic notifications, shopping deals, FOMO and more, forcing us to decide where to place our attention. The sheer volume of options can be overwhelming. 'There are thousands of choices, from which shade of nail varnish to wear, to which programme to watch on TV, and these micro-decisions affect our ability to pay attention,' says Antoinette.

A Microsoft study found that, since 2013, our attention span has dropped from 12 seconds to eight – a second shorter than that of a goldfish.

DOES IT AFFECT WOMEN MORE?

'Women are notoriously prone to juggling, navigating multiple decisions per day,' says Antoinette. 'We put pressure on ourselves to be decisive and strong, yet we are often bound up by a fear of getting it wrong.'

Couple this with hormonal changes in the run-up to the menopause, and it doesn't get easier. 'Because levels of sex hormones (particularly oestrogen and progesterone) begin dropping as early as age 30, even young women can experience moments of indecision,' say Claire Dale and Patricia Peyton, authors of *Physical Intelligence*.

However, there are ways to harness your decisiveness.

WORDS BY ELEANOR VOUSDEN. PHOTO (POSED BY MODEL): GETTY IMAGES.
*UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

DECISION TIME?

MAKE BIG DECISIONS IN THE MORNING

The more choices you make throughout the day, the more fatigued you become, and the harder decisions are to make. American writer Mark Twain once said, ‘If it’s your job to eat a frog, it’s best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it’s your job to eat two frogs, it’s best to eat the biggest one first.’

Making a hard decision first thing will free you from procrastination for the day. ‘The brain doesn’t like to be in a state of dissonance, which is why it will keep calling you back to make a decision that you’ve left – it’s the reason why we wake at 4am fixated on a problem,’ explains Dr Georgina Barnett, lead psychologist at Seventy Thirty dating agency. ‘The accumulation of unmade decisions leaves us de-energised and overwhelmed, which is why it’s better to get good at making fast and efficient decisions,’ she says. So make that to-do list and do the hardest task first thing.

> ‘It is always better to allow emotions to subside before deciding on a course of action’

GO WITH YOUR GUT

If you’ve ever “had a feeling” about something, you’ll know that your gut is often tied to intuition. ‘What’s really happening when we go with our gut and get it right is that it’s usually a decision or experience we’ve been through many times, so we are essentially experts at decision-making in that area,’ says Dr Georgina.

There’s a reason why our gut is often referred to as our “second brain”. ‘We absolutely do have a “gut brain” – a highly sophisticated neural network transmitting billions of messages from the gut to the brain and back again every second,’ says Claire. You should also avoid making decisions when you’re hungry. Research* has shown that making a choice on an empty stomach negatively affects our decision-making ability, leaving us more inclined to go for the easier rather than the best decision.

SLEEP ON IT

‘While we sleep, our memories are re-organised, clearing out less relevant content and giving us clarity and insight,’ says Dr Georgina. If you’re angry or sad, it may also be better to rest before making an emotionally charged decision. ‘It is always better to allow emotions to subside before deciding on a course of action,’ adds Dr Georgina.

However, watch that you’re not just putting the decision off for another day. ‘There is a danger with “sleeping on it”, and that’s if it is really an avoidance strategy!’ she warns. ‘In this case, it is no different from procrastination, giving us the temporary relief of not having to engage with a potentially frustrating decision-making process.’

DUMP IT, DELEGATE IT, DO IT!

If you’ve been agonising over a decision, adopt this approach.

✢ **DUMP IT** ‘Often we make a list of our priorities, but we add more and more items that are less important and wonder why we suddenly feel overwhelmed,’ says Dr Georgina. ‘Continually adding unimportant things that don’t get done means we feel we have underachieved, which leads to disempowering feelings of guilt and shame,’ she says. Look at your list – does it need to be done right away? If not, dump it and focus on your priorities.

✢ **DELEGATE IT** Appoint some help. ‘Two things interfere with delegation,’ says Dr Georgina. ‘The first is the belief that we can do it better ourselves, and the second is guilt about burdening someone else.’ But, if someone else can help, don’t be afraid to ask.

✢ **DO IT** ‘What’s left are the important tasks we need to execute,’ says Dr Georgina. ‘Do these when they need to be done, whether you feel like it or not. If it’s uninspiring, focus on the sense of relief and achievement you’ll feel when it’s done.’

Is it TIME YOU did nothin

If you feel like a slave to your never-ending to-do list, now might just be the moment to hit pause...

g?

It's all too easy to find yourself on a treadmill of constant work, family and social commitments. But what if you just did nothing for a change?

When did you last take a moment that was truly to yourself, with no distractions? Some of our favourite wellbeing experts reveal their tricks for injecting some much-needed laziness into our hectic lives...

Why are we so busy?

These days people seem to wear their busyness as a badge of honour, but where have we developed this habit?

'From generation to generation, we have been passed these thoughts that date back to wartime,' says Lisa Hawkyard, mindset expert and coach (lisahawkyard.com). 'We are praised for keeping going when in fact this can cause so much damage mentally and physically.' Lisa has seen a rise in clients who feel overwhelmed.

Time to take 10?

Carving time out for yourself can often feel self-indulgent, but doing so can make you more productive, healthier and happier. 'Every 90 minutes our minds naturally rest and we go into a daydream state, helping the unconscious processes of healing, learning and growth,' says psychotherapist and hypnotherapist Nick Davies (ndhypnotherapy.com). 'If you power through, you activate your body's "stress response", increasing your heart rate and blood pressure,' he explains. What's more, giving your brain some downtime can lead to great ideas.

'Doing nothing is pretty much essential if we're to harness our creativity,' says Hilda Burke, psychotherapist and author of *The Phone Addiction Workbook*. It's often why solutions to your problems will pop into your head during a shower or walk. Turn over for the four key me-time drainers to watch out for...

Technology

'Look around you next time you're standing at an ATM. How many people are doing nothing? My guess is that 80% will be on their phone,' says Hilda. 'As smartphone users, we're neither focusing fully nor allowing our minds to rest. Both states are compromised.' When we're scrolling through emails or apps, our brains enter a state that is the least productive and least relaxing mode, leaving us feeling depleted.

How to manage it

Dedicate an allotted time for emails and being on your phone – that way, the rest of the day can be focused on other daily tasks and free up me time. Turning off push notifications will also help to stay off technology when you don't need to be on it. 'Adopt set hours of the day that are device-free,' advises Lisa. Many smartphones now have the option to schedule "downtime" (eg, evenings) when you're not alerted to notifications.

Multitasking

When our to-do list is as long as our arm, we soon find ourselves feeling overwhelmed, and try to juggle multiple tasks. 'A scattergun approach is not going to be sustainable in the long run – you'll end up feeling burnt-out as you knee-jerk react to everything that comes your way,' warns business coach Linda Davies-Carr (themasterfixer.com).

'Rushing from one task to the next without pausing to rest doesn't help us do our best work,' says Val Mattinson, creative business coach and wellbeing mentor. 'It causes us to overlook important details. When we stop rushing, we make fewer mistakes because we're more focused.'

How to manage it

Focus on one task at a time and avoid the temptation to hop from one job to another. 'I enjoy batching my to-do list and blocking out sections on my calendar to concentrate on one task only,' says Linda. 'Be realistic about what you're capable of doing at a given time – the most organised people give themselves tasks that they are capable of performing while still managing to push themselves,' she says.

Other people

Sometimes, it's not our behaviours that are standing in our way, but others'.

'We spend much of our days working to others' timetables, whether it's our boss, partner or children, so try to find a couple of times a week to do something just for you,' says Alex Crow, NLP practitioner and hypnotist. Trying to please all people all the time will leave you feeling exhausted.

How to manage it

Turning down obligations may be hard at first – you might wrongly feel that you're being rude – but it's key to developing personal boundaries.

'Learning how to say no does not mean that you are a failure, or that you don't know how to manage your time properly,' says Linda. 'Saying no is the smart way to prioritise activities that will bring you the most benefit.'

Book in some time for yourself – but treat it like an important appointment. 'You have to look at taking a break as an investment in your own health – it's like going to the gym. You spend an hour doing something that will later have multiple benefits to your brain and your body. Schedule that time into the diary so you can't forget about it.'

Social media

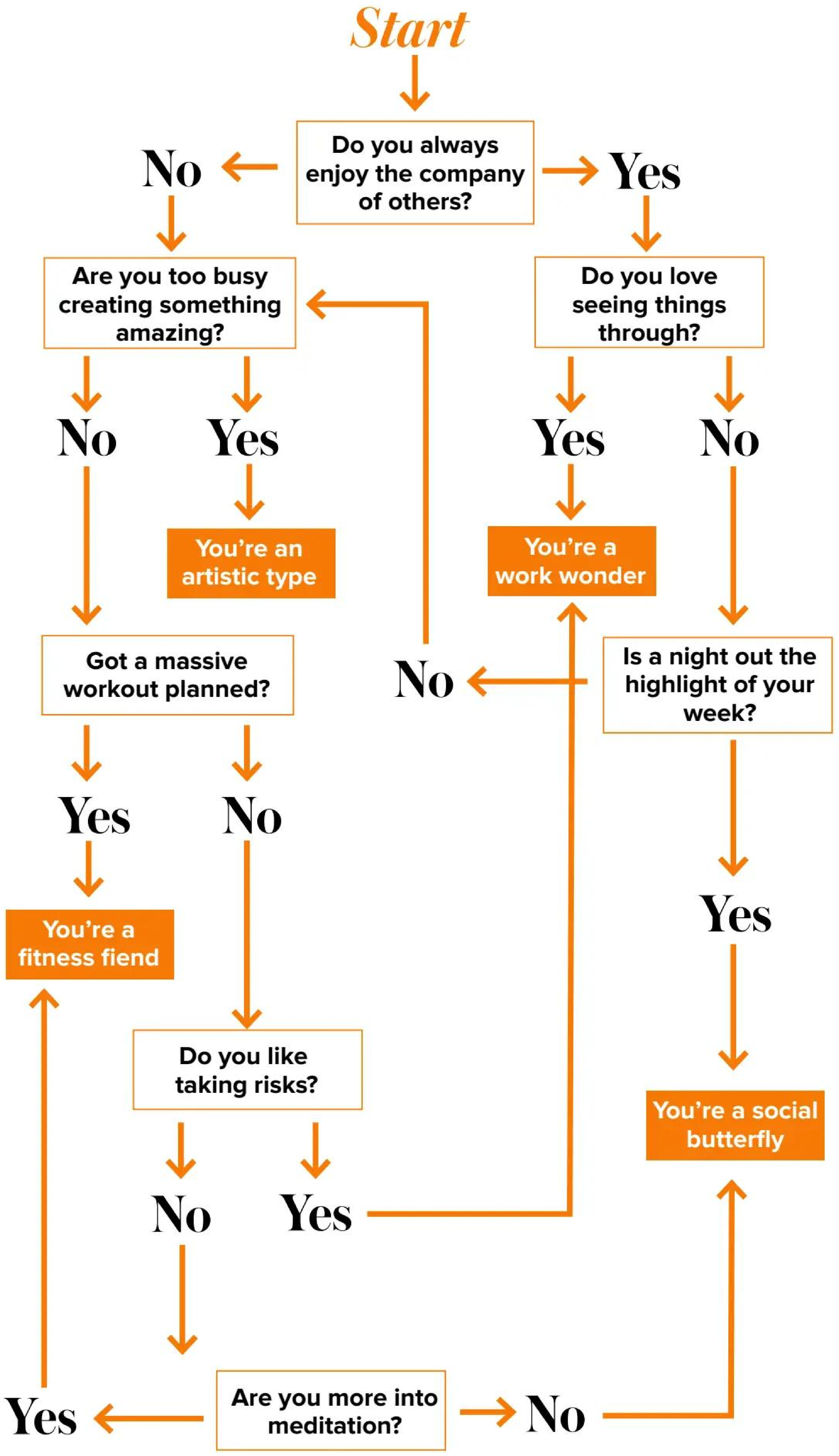
Seeing an endless highlight reel of your Facebook friends' achievements, holidays and events acts as a constant reminder of the things we could or should be doing. 'Unless we are consciously aware that the majority only post the successes, it can be so easy to get lost in the fake-ness that it can be,' explains Lisa. 'The more we look for the successes to compare to that we may not be good enough, successful enough, then that's exactly what we will see,' she says.

How to manage it

Remember that we are all on our own journey. 'What is happening for one is not necessarily happening for another. It doesn't mean that you are incapable – it simply means that you are in your own lane, moving at your pace,' says Lisa. 'If we take a step back and know that we are where we are meant to be, it takes the pressure off.' It can help to mute people who make you feel bad, or list your own achievements. 'Look back over the last year of your own journey – that is your truth, not a screenshot of an edited reality,' says Lisa.

Find your downtime

Do you prefer time alone, or do you thrive around friends? 'There are many factors, from how extroverted or introverted we are to how much we get from certainty versus change,' says life coach Marie Houlden. Do the quiz below, and then read the section on the right that matches your personality.


Start
Do you always enjoy the company of others?
No
Yes
Are you too busy creating something amazing?
Do you love seeing things through?
No
Yes
Yes
No
You're an artistic type
You're a work wonder
Got a massive workout planned?
No
Is a night out the highlight of your week?
Yes
No
Yes
You're a fitness fiend
Do you like taking risks?
You're a social butterfly
No
Yes
Yes
Are you more into meditation?
No

Relax your way

We all let go in different ways – here are Marie's suggestions...

WORK WONDERS

While most are snoozing their alarms, you're ready for another goal-achieving day. However, work doesn't have to be your only focus. 'Volunteering will give similarly purposeful feelings, and provide health benefits – a Carnegie Mellon University study revealed volunteers have lower blood pressure and a longer lifespan,' says Marie.

SOCIAL BUTTERFLIES

You're extroverted by nature, so you get a boost from being around others. However, you should avoid being sapped by others' moods. Around 70% of our energy is emotional, so if a friend is down, build distraction amid the deep chats with a dance class, or watch a comedy to help lift the spirits.

FITNESS FIENDS

Whether it's a long walk or a gym class, you need a regular session to feel happy. But what kind depends on if you're an introvert or extrovert. For introverts, 'A yoga class will help you connect with your intuitive side, and allow you to stretch and repair,' Marie says. However, if you're more extroverted, 'Set up a running club with friends, or book in regular workouts and stick to them.' Mix up your exercise routine to curb boredom.

ARTISTIC TYPES

From crafting to museum visits, you're all about solitary experiences that educate and enrich you. But the detail of life can get you down and skipping essential admin can create stress. So apply your creativity to keeping on top of tasks – opt for a gorgeous diary with plenty of room for genius ideas.

WORDS: ELEANOR VOUSDEN. PHOTOS: GETTY, ALAMY

The power to CHANGE

Willpower – some people seem to have bucketloads while others are found wanting. But, we discover, goal success is within reach of us all

Losing weight, giving up smoking, saving for a house deposit or just flossing your teeth. Big or small, when it comes to reaching our goals in life, how many of us have lamented a lack of willpower?

But what is this power to exercise will over our decisions? Why are some people better at inhibiting their impulses? And is it possible to gain more resolve?

'We understand willpower as that ability to block out short-term temptations and procrastination in order to achieve longer-term, more meaningful goals – the goals we really, truly want,' explains Stacy Moore, psychologist and practice lead at Inner Circles Psychology. 'The responsive, primitive part of the brain is satisfied by short-term goals of what it wants as opposed to what it needs.

'We need willpower to activate the part of our brain that controls decision-making, rationalising, analysing and moral reasoning. This helps us to achieve those goals that require us to stick at something for a longer amount of time.'

> 'Block out short-term temptations'

A basic level of self-control is innate in almost everything we do. But, more recently, the concept of willpower has been causing a stir in the world of psychology. For a long time, it was accepted that some people were simply better at self-discipline. However, a series of recent studies* suggests this may be a myth.

'When tested objectively, even people who say they have really good willpower don't show a difference compared with others,' says Stacy. Let's delve into the wonders of willpower…

Psychologist Stacy Moore

Mindset coach Sarah Wheeler

Naturopath Louise Westra

Six steps to work with your willpower

1 *MAKE IT WORTHWHILE*

Doing something because we "should" is not a recipe for success. Just knowing we ought to exercise more or drink less is not going to motivate us long-term. So before setting a goal, ask yourself: is it worth it? Do you really want it? 'Pick goals that are in tune with your values and that you think are important, as opposed to focusing on things society has told us we should do,' advises Stacy.

2 *LITTLE AND OFTEN*

Relying on willpower alone is draining. 'We are creatures of habit,' says leadership and mindset coach Sarah Wheeler. 'Making a big change or lots of changes at once can be overwhelming. You'll end up exhausted from the effort and your willpower will wear out.' That's when you fall victim to temptation. 'Say you decide to exercise each morning. Then, when you wake up, your gym gear is in the wash and you can't find your running shoes. Straight away, it feels difficult. But if you lay everything out the night before, suddenly the change is much easier.' By taking small steps and turning the changes into habits, you remove the need for willpower. 'What you want is to not rely on willpower,' says Sarah. 'The more you do things that make you feel good, the more you want to do it.'

WORDS: SU KARNEY. MAIN PHOTO (POSED BY MODELS): ALAMY. *SAUNDERS, B, MILYAVSKAYA, M, ETZ, A, RANDLES, D, & INZLICHT, M. (2018). **PROCHASKA & DICLEMENTE (1983)

3 SEE THE FUTURE

'When you set a goal, be specific. For example, I want to run 5K in three months' time. How are you going to feel when you get to that point? How are you going to look? Identify all the benefits,' says Sarah. 'You're likely to have great energy and feel proud of yourself. Linking your goals to positive feelings and emotions makes it more real. And when change does feel difficult, you can focus on the end result. If the talk in your head is negative, you will need much more willpower.'

4 ACCEPTANCE

The Cycle of Change model tells us that relapse is a normal consequence of change. So if you slip up and give in to temptation, don't write it off as failure. 'Guilt and shame are the worst emotions to support a building of our willpower,' says Stacy. 'Lingering on those times when you haven't shown willpower just helps your brain to fixate more on the lack of you being able to achieve it. It pushes the goal further into the future and makes it less something that you would associate yourself with.'**

5 DE-STRESS

'When the body is stressed the adrenal glands release cortisol. This inhibits the prefrontal cortex – the willpower centre that heavily influences the capacity for rational decision-making,' says Stacy. 'So that leads to more risk-taking or comfort-seeking behaviours. These choices are rewarded by our bodies releasing dopamine – the "feel-good" hormone – so effectively our bodies reward us for making poor choices!' Naturopath Louise Westra recommends a herbal supplement like Nutri Advanced Siberian Ginseng + Liquorice Tincture (**nutriadvanced.co.uk**) to combat stress. 'Adaptogens like ginseng aid our ability to adapt under pressure,' she adds.

nutri
ADVANCED
Siberian Ginseng
+ Liquorice
Synergistic Herbal Blend

6 POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS

Consider ways to make change as positive and pleasurable as possible. Sarah suggests: **Social support –** enlist the help of friends and family. Discuss what you want to achieve and have weekly catch ups to keep you motivated and get through any blips; **Rewards –** when you reach a milestone, award yourself a treat, be it a pampering treatment, new clothes or a night out; **Environment –** the right setting will make all the difference. If you're dieting, choose a restaurant that serves tasty, healthy food or exercise to music you enjoy.

Regrets ARE GOOD FOR YOU

Stuck in a rut of wishing you'd done things differently? It's hard to break free, but processing regrets can help us move forward

Ever wish you'd left the house earlier, reworded that email or stopped short of being cajoled into a full head of highlights? We all have regrets, big and small, and the good news is that we should be giving ourselves permission to have them. No more ruminating over what we did or didn't do – the new goal is not to be a victim of the past, and to learn to accept ourselves just as we are.

1 ACKNOWLEDGE REGRETS

Regrets are a common experience and it's unrealistic to believe that life can, or should, be devoid of them. The sorrow over "fundamental regrets" (relationships, work, health, life choices) can 'run deep and feel very intense', says Karin Sieger. The key is to acknowledge their existence and then learn how to manage them. Nobody can sashay through life getting it correct every time, making all the right decisions at exactly the right moments. Of course, there may well be a job or relationship that you still dwell on but, by acknowledging that these feelings exist, you can learn to rationalise their impact by choosing the level of emotional pull they have over you.

DO IT Take back control by giving yourself permission to acknowledge that the regret exists but detach from the emotional impact you are feeding it with. 'Regrets can make us feel stuck and block us from growing and fulfilling our potential,' says Sieger. Remind yourself that regrets are human – we all have them.

OUR EXPERTS

KARIN SIEGER is a psychotherapist, writer and podcaster. She specialises in help with transitions, anxiety, grief and life-changing illnesses; karinsieger.com

WINDY DRYDEN, Emeritus Professor of Psychotherapeutic Studies at Goldsmiths University, specialises in single-session and very brief interventions. He's written many books, including *Ten Steps to Positive Living* (Routledge).

CANDI WILLIAMS is the author of *How to be Perfectly Imperfect* (Summersdale).

2 ACCEPT THE PAST

Inflexible thinking can trap us in a cycle of regretting past decisions, according to Windy Dryden. 'We blame ourselves for what has happened rather than seeing our behaviour in a wider context and understanding why we took the path we did, based on the information we had at the time.' We may have spent years regretting a decision like not going for a new job, deciding not to breastfeed or emigrating to the other side of the world, when the truth is that decision probably made sense at the time. It's only with hindsight it perhaps falls short of the romantic fixed narrative we had constructed for ourselves; the impossible standards we have set in our personal or professional lives.

DO IT Dryden suggests we try switching the negative conversations in our heads to productive ones. Instead of "I should have done that", self-berating, try asking the harder questions, "I wonder why I did/didn't do that?". The answers will help you remove your blinkers, accept your past self and open the door to repair.

3 BREAK THE HABIT

Okay, so you've realised that regrets can be persistent and very convincing. Sieger refers to them as "slippery and seductive" because they draw you in and exhaust your emotional reserves. To help you move on and break the cycle of ruminative regret, Dryden suggests the next step is to 'neither engage nor try to eliminate them'. Try thinking of something you regret, like a conversation with a friend where you gossiped too much. Don't dwell on all the details, fuelling your frustration and shame. Instead, allow the memory to exist but not consume or rule you.

DO IT If you feel the familiar negative thought pattern seeping in, breathe slowly inwards and think to yourself, what can I learn from this? Remind yourself of Dryden's words: "I thought it was right at the time I did it, it may have been bad but I'm not bad". Breathe deeply, exhale the negative emotion and choose not to re-engage with it.

4 LEARN FROM REGRETS

Regrets represent our conscience and they can motivate us to take corrective action in the future. Pinpoint what it is that makes you feel regretful, and what traps you keep falling into. Perhaps you drink too much, overspend, or speak without thinking first. Aim to tweak your future responses. Making a poor decision does not mean that you are doomed to permanent failure. As Sieger reminds us, 'Regrets can turn into the experiences that help you unfold your potential.'

DO IT Practise mindful strategies like counting to ten before reacting in triggering situations. Be aware of the impact of your words. Focus on things you can control, like starting a spending diary or monitoring your alcohol intake.

5 LET YOURSELF OFF THE HOOK

Sieger's most powerful message is that we should forgive ourselves and step away from negative thought patterns by 'acting on regrets, responsibly and fairly towards others and most of all towards ourselves.' Remind yourself that it's never too late and, if handled correctly, many an important life lesson and positive change can grow out of regrets. Candi Williams reiterates this thought process and describes how limiting it is to try to live a life where everything is "perfect". She recommends that we focus on living purposefully rather than perfectly, so that we can reach a place where we no longer 'magnify flaws and play down strengths.'

DO IT Williams advises us to conserve our energy for positivity rather than wasting energy holding on to pain. 'Learn to let go of things that hurt you, no longer serve you or make you question your worth.' The release you feel will, 'give you more time and space to focus on things that really matter – things that bring you happiness, joy and self-love.'

WORDS: CLARE BOWIE. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

The MISTAKES *even* smart people make

When it comes to self-worth, are you your own worst enemy? These tactics can help stop the subconscious self-sabotaging...

How often do you catch yourself saying sorry when you've done nothing wrong or worrying about what others think? Imagine how much better life would be if you stopped being so hard on yourself. 'It's common for women to find themselves repeatedly in the same situation,' says Camilla Sacre-Dallerup, life and transformational coach and author of *It's Not You, It's Me* (Watkins).

'But, by becoming more aware and changing the behaviours blocking your flow, you can finally start to manifest the life you want.'

WHAT YOU'RE DOING WRONG AND HOW TO MAKE IT RIGHT...

1 *CARING TOO MUCH ABOUT WHAT OTHERS THINK*

'This happens when you base your worth solely on outside validation,' says Camilla. 'Feeling validated is an inside job. It starts by working on your own self-worth, accepting who you fully are, embracing what makes you unique and knowing that you are doing your best.'

✱ WHAT YOU CAN DO: Use positive affirmations daily while changing your mindset. For example, 'I am worthy. I am validated. I validate myself.' Simply repeat these to yourself silently whenever you catch yourself wanting that validation from others.'

2 TAKING ON TOO MUCH

Does looking at your diary make you feel dizzy? 'A lot of women find it very hard to say no,' says occupational psychologist Kate Keenan. 'So, you work late; go to dinner when you'd rather stay in; or end up taking an elderly relative to the GP because the rest of the family "haven't got time".

✱ WHAT YOU CAN DO: Learn to say no! 'There's a psychological tool called the broken record technique, where you keep saying the same thing over and over,' explains Kate. 'For example, "I can't do that because I've already made plans". Just keep repeating the same thing. Give one clear reason why you can't do something or don't explain at all. You'll find saying no gets easier with practice.'

3 BLAMING YOURSELF

'Imagine you text someone and they don't get back to you,' says Camilla. 'You might think, "What did I do wrong? Did I say something to offend them? Am I not a good friend or work colleague?"'

✱ WHAT YOU CAN DO: Don't take it personally. Presume it has nothing to do with you. Maybe they're busy, or they've got something going on in their life. Instead of blaming yourself for everything, such as your partner's bad mood, just know that you are enough. When you feel enough, you're far less likely to blame yourself and take things personally.

4 LACKING CONFIDENCE

'We can all achieve confidence if we treat it like any other muscle in the body,' says Camilla. 'Once you accept that confidence lies on the other side of discomfort, you can get on with building it. You just have to engage with that discomfort.'

✱ WHAT YOU CAN DO: Take up new challenges. It may feel uncomfortable to begin with but you'll soon grow in confidence. Think of things you've done well. If something goes wrong, remind yourself what you're good at.

5 TRYING TO BE PERFECT

'Some women are naturally perfectionists,' says chartered psychologist Dr Megan Arroll. 'For others, these unreasonably high standards stem from childhood. When we grow up with overly critical caregivers, we feel whatever we do, it's never quite good enough.'

✱ WHAT YOU CAN DO: Stop when you get to "good enough" – as a perfectionist, your good enough is "very good" by others' standards.

6 FEELING GUILTY TAKING TIME OUT

Always on the go? 'We're taught hard work reaps rewards,' says James Reeves, co-author of *The Book of Rest* (HarperCollins). 'Yet, often, insight jumps out of nowhere when your mind is quiet and at rest.'

✱ WHAT YOU CAN DO: Take at least 20 minutes a day to sit quietly, meditate, or just do nothing. Designate times to switch off from social media, your smartphone and emails.

7 ALWAYS SAYING SORRY

We've all done it. "Sorry to bother you; sorry to interrupt; sorry my food seems to be cold…". 'Being able to apologise and own your faults is an important skill,' says Camilla. 'But apologising when you've done absolutely nothing wrong is showing that you value someone else's opinion over your own. It's giving your power away.'

✱ WHAT YOU CAN DO: Become more aware of those situations where you're most likely to blurt out "sorry". Instead, take a deep breath and just say nothing. Observe how the situation plays out. See how much stronger you feel.

YOUR DAILY CHECKLIST

Want to break certain habits and behaviours? Camilla suggests following these guidelines.

Whenever you feel triggered, for example, feeling belittled when someone speaks to you in a certain way, ask yourself these questions. Over time, it'll help to raise your awareness so you can implement positive changes.

✢ What feelings and emotions did that person highlight within me?

✢ What would happen if I asserted myself and started to presume I'm enough and worthy?

✢ How would my day change if I started to love myself a little more?

✢ What needs to happen for me to feel validated?

✢ Can I accept that I am able to validate myself?

✢ What's stopping me from feeling enough?

✢ Can I believe right now that I am enough?

✢ How do I feel when I don't act from a place of feeling worthy?

✢ How do I feel when I act from a place of feeling worthy?

WORDS: EVA GIZOWSKA. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Too stressed to SLEEP?

If your racing mind is stopping you switching off at night, we've got some easy tricks for instant calm and better rest...

Feeling frazzled? You are not alone. Research has found that two thirds of us are more stressed out now than five years ago*, which not only impacts how we function during the day, but also how we sleep at night. In fact, 58%** of adults blame underlying stress for not getting enough shut-eye. 'Many people struggle to sleep due to stress and worries manifesting themselves during a time when they are vulnerable,' says sleep expert Dr Nerina Ramlakhan. 'Problems can seem heightened because we go into an almost childlike state when we sleep at night. There are things during the day that might not seem like a big problem, but at night they can appear a lot worse, especially during the couple of hours before bed.' Need help to get some much-needed rest during times of stress? Here's how...

Cut the caffeine earlier

'Most of us are aware that drinking a cup of coffee straight before bed is likely to keep us up at night, but many underestimate the effect that our caffeine intake throughout the day could be having on our sleep habits,' says Dr Sarah Jarvis, working with Sealy UK. 'If you're regularly struggling to nod off, try cutting caffeine out completely from lunchtime onwards to see if it has a positive effect on your sleeping habits.'

9.5 million
NHS appointments each year are related to poor sleep.

Don't use your phone on the toilet

Always scrolling? 'When standing in a queue, we turn to our smartphones, and some people don't even go to the toilet without theirs,' says Dr Ramlakhan. 'This leaves no time for your body and mind to properly process things in our lives, so our thoughts reappear and keep the mind going, which can be a particular problem when we try to go to sleep.' If you're guilty, then schedule in smartphone downtime during the day.

Ease off the booze

'It can be tempting to have a drink or two to "unwind" before bed, especially if you're feeling stressed – but, while alcohol may help you get off to sleep, it can lead to disrupted sleep,' says Dr Jarvis. 'You're also more likely to experience rebound anxiety the next morning.'

Have a set wind-down routine

'If you have to work in the evening, stop at least an hour before you need to get to bed,' says medical nutritionist Dr Naomi Beinart. 'Write down your to-do list for the next day. Then do anything that relaxes you, such as having a bath and then reading for 20 minutes. Having a set wind-down routine helps your mind and body to let go of the day and prepare for sleep.'

Exercise at the right time

'Those who do a cardio workout (such as swimming or jogging) at 7am sleep longer, fall into deeper sleep cycles, and spend 75% more time in reparative slumber than those who work out later in the day,' says Dr Jarvis. 'Cardio workouts also elevate the body's temperature, so exercise at least three hours before bedtime in order to avoid a disrupted sleep schedule.'

36%
of women admit money worries are the reason they're too stressed to sleep, says Equifax.

And breathe...

'Forms of mediation have been proven to help relax the body and mind,' says Neil Robinson, chief sleep officer at Sealy UK. 'Slowly inhaling and exhaling will help to calm your nervous system, lower your heart rate and lead to you feeling relaxed ahead of your bedtime.'

Try this NHS-recommended breathing exercise to relax your mind and body so you can switch off...

1. Lie in bed, arms away from your sides, palms facing up.
2. Breathe deeply in through your nose, counting steadily from one to five (or as far as you can comfortably).
3. Without pausing, breathe out gently >>

through your mouth, counting to five. Keep going for three to five minutes.

Create a haven in the bedroom

Bedroom full of clutter? It could be adding unnecessary stress. 'Make your bed a place you enjoy spending time in, rather than dread,' says Neil. 'A comfortable healthy sleeping environment will promote deep and restful sleep.'

Herbal helpers

Need to de-stress, fast? These natural remedies can help provide relief...

- **A Vogel Dormeasan Sleep (Boots)** is a blend of valerian root and hops to help aid anxious thoughts.
- **Together Natural Night Time Marine Magnesium Complex (Holland & Barrett)** has five types of marine magnesium to calm the nervous system.
- **Healthspan CBD Oil Capsules (healthspan.co.uk)** contains cannabidiol to help boost REM sleep.

Perfect pillowcase

Want to try something different? Slumberdown has launched two new scented pillowcases, designed to help you unwind. Try Berry Bliss or Tropical Twist (amazon.co.uk).

Slumberdown
Berry Bliss
Scented Pillow
Slumberdown
Tropical Twist
Scented Pillow

Stop stressing about the time

Do you look at the clock when you wake in the night? It could be doing you more harm than you realise. 'One of the worst things people can do when they wake up during the night is to look at the clock,' says Dr Ramlakhan. This is because over-measurement of sleep, especially using tracking devices, is causing a new disorder called orthosomnia. 'This is where you're unhealthily preoccupied with how much sleep you are or aren't getting,' adds Dr Ramlakhan. The solution? Distract yourself. 'It's very easy to start counting down the hours until you need to be up in the morning and getting stressed as a result,' says Dr Jarvis. 'Cover up the clocks, get up and do something else in another room, such as reading a book. Once you start feeling more relaxed you can try going back to bed – sometimes a change of scene is enough to help you nod off.'

EAT YOURSELF CALMER

A healthy diet is key when your body is under pressure. 'This means eating well, staying hydrated and avoiding too much refined sugar,' says Dr Ramlakhan. Here's our daily pick...

BREAKFAST
Porridge gives you sustained energy.

MORNING SNACK
Sunflower seeds are high in magnesium to help lower levels of stress hormone cortisol. 'It's known as "nature's tranquilliser" as it's associated with relaxation,' says Dr Beinart.

LUNCH
Cold turkey in a salad or sandwich is ideal as it contains the calming amino acid tryptophan.

AFTERNOON DRINK
Swap your 4pm cuppa for a green tea, which reduces tension-making beta waves, and has lower levels of caffeine, so won't leave you jittery.

DINNER
Go for beef or white fish – these are high in the B vitamins needed to make feel-good serotonin. Make sure you include lots of magnesium – leafy vegetables, pumpkin seeds, buckwheat pasta, pulses and rye bread are good sources.

If your stress levels are affecting your ability to cope with everyday life and you need further help, contact your doctor

3 of the best apps

✢ **SLEEP STORIES**
(calm.com/sleep) Famous voices, including Joanna Lumley, Leona Lewis, Matthew McConaughey and Stephen Fry, narrate calming tales to help you nod off.

✢ **HEADSPACE**
(App Store and GooglePlay) Contains meditation guides to help lower the heart rate and slow your breathing for a better night's rest.

✢ **SLEEPIO**
(free, sleepio.com/nhs) Employs techniques from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to help users overcome insomnia.

WORDS: FAYE M SMITH. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES
*HEADSPACE **HILLARYS.CO.UK.

5 *Smart sleep gadgets (that work!)*

Tech can often keep us awake, but these smart buys help to combat that...

THE WATCH

This stylish watch can detect whether you're getting light, deep or REM sleep, so you can adjust your daytime habits. **Polar Ignite (polar.com/ignite)**

THE ALARM CLOCK

Not only does this come with a wind-down meditation feature, it connects to smart cameras around the home to help give you peace of mind. **Lenovo Smart Clock (Currys)**

THE DIFFUSER

This uses naturally harmonising salt to cleanse the air – just add aromatherapy oils for extra ambience. **Glo Himalayan Salt Aroma Diffuser (madebyzen.com)**

THE EYE MASK

A handy mask that blocks out light and plays relaxing music through the integrated earphones. **Music Sleep Mask (prezzybox.com)**

THE VAPE PEN

This uses completely safe and legal CBD hemp oil ingested as a vapour to help relieve tension and aid sleep. **Sleep CBD Cartridge & Rechargeable Pen Battery (calyfx.co.uk)**

The A-Z of better sleep

Get a good night's rest with these expert-backed bedtime hacks

AFTER-HOURS

When it comes to having better, healthier sleep, the first step can simply be going to bed earlier. According to research by The Sleep Council, 19% of Brits aren't in bed before midnight, with nearly a third of us hitting the hay between 11pm and 12am. However, studies show that people with an early-to-bed, early-to-rise routine are less likely to develop mental-health problems than night owls. Scientists say it takes just two weeks to tweak your body clock so that you fall sleep earlier.

BREW UP

pukka
organic latte
night time

We already love the sleep-inducing benefits of chamomile, lavender or valerian herbal tea, but the latest drink to sip before bed is an organic lighttime latte. Try this velvety blend of oats and ashwagandha to help you nod off: Pukka Herbs Organic Night Time Herbal Latte, Tesco.

CBD

You may have heard the hype about CBD, but how can it help you sleep? CBD oil works on the body's endocannabinoid system (ECS), which maintains stability in processes like sleep, pain perception, digestion, cognition, memory, mood and immunity. 'Clinical research has found that taking CBD oil at bedtime can alleviate insomnia and help people sleep for longer. What's more, it doesn't create the "sleep hangover" effect typical of many sleeping pills,' explains nutritionist Fiona Lawson. Try 2-4 drops of CannabiGold Classic 500mg, **bionativa.co.uk**.

CannabiGold
Classic
500mg
12ml

DUST MITES

These pesky bedfellows – or, rather, their waste – are the most common cause of allergies in the home, giving us sleep-stealing symptoms like sneezing, stuffy nose, sore eyes and itchy skin. The average mattress contains tens of thousands of mites, and they love the warm, cosy conditions of duvets and pillows. To keep mites at bay, buy anti-allergy bedding, wash bedding at 60°C and regularly vacuum the mattress.

ENOUGH?

Everyone is different, and so is the amount of sleep we need. 'On average, a normal amount of sleep for an adult is considered to be around seven to nine hours a night,' says Dr Irshaad Ebrahim of The London Sleep Centre. This usually drops to seven to eight hours for over 65s. Use how you feel mid-morning to gauge your quota. If you're refreshed and alert, then you're probably getting enough sleep.

FITNESS FABLE

Evidence shows that adults of all ages report sleeping significantly better after doing at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week. But does the timing of your workout affect your ability to drop off? It was previously believed that strenuous exercise in the evening delayed sleep due to the rise in body temperature and the release of adrenaline, norepinephrine and cortisol, but recent findings have dismissed this idea. A study published in the *Sports Medicine* journal revealed that, as long you have an hour's recovery before bed, moderate exercise is not detrimental to a good night's sleep.

GUT HEALTH

Our gut microbiome produces and releases neurotransmitters linked to sleep, including serotonin and GABA. The sleep hormone melatonin is also produced in the gut. Some research suggests we should focus on gut health for better sleep quality. Eat prebiotic foods, such as onions, garlic, beans, pulses and lentils, and try taking a supplement, such as Healthspan Super 50 Pro, **healthspan.co.uk**.

healthspan
Super20 Pro

HOT, HOT, HOT

Nearly half of menopausal women suffer with hot flushes and night sweats, according to a survey by the British Menopause Society. Taking a cool shower, keeping your bedroom cool and avoiding potential triggers such as spicy food, caffeine, nicotine and alcohol before bed can help reduce discomfort. A bedding range from menopause clothing specialists Become boasts moisture-wicking properties that it claims keeps skin drier and cooler during a sweat. Become DermaTherapy, **webecome.co.uk**.

INSOMNIA

Struggle to fall asleep in under 30 minutes? Wake regularly through the night? Feel your daytime functioning is negatively impacted? If it's been happening for over three months, this is insomnia. You don't have to accept it, though. 'CBT for insomnia is an NHS-recommended treatment which is so effective that studies show up to 85% of people will see improved sleep, often in under four weeks,' says Kathryn Pinkham, founder of The Insomnia Clinic (**theinsomniaclinic.co.uk**). 'CBT works by tackling the physical side of the condition and re-aligning your body clock.'

JUST EAT

Sleep-friendly foods are packed with tryptophan, an amino acid that boosts sleep hormone melatonin. Turkey, milk, walnuts and pumpkin seeds are all good sources to snack on before bed.

KEEP CALM

'If you're feeling stressed before bed, focus on breathing deeply and slowly, inhaling for a count of four through the nose and exhaling for seven seconds through the mouth,' says stress and relaxation expert and motivational speaker Carole Spiers.

LIFE-SAVING

Getting adequate amounts of sleep can add years to your life and reduce the risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, cancer and dementia. 'Almost every known ailment is linked in some way to poor sleep. Sleep deprivation increases our risk of developing health issues and it reduces our body's ability to cope with them,' says Professor Jason Ellis, director of the Northumbria Centre of Sleep Research.

MAGIC OF MAGNESIUM

Low magnesium levels are linked to restlessness and frequent waking, and research shows a supplement can improve sleep quality. Up your intake with the Together Night Time Marine Magnesium Complex, **togetherhealth.com** – a calming concoction of ocean-sourced magnesium with calcium and 5-HTP from Griffonia extract.

together
OceanPure
NIGHT TIME
marine magnesium complex

NAKED

Only one in five Brits sleeps in the buff despite there being proven advantages to the practice. Reasons to bare include better body temperature regulation, promoting a deeper sleep and faster metabolism. You'll also get a boost of oxytocin from skin-to-skin contact if sleeping with a naked partner.

OILS

Aromatherapy oils not only make your bedroom smell good, but relieve stress and promote relaxation, enabling you to drop off faster. Try sleep-inducing classics lavender, ylang-ylang, clary sage or jasmine misted into the air via a diffuser. Our favourite? Neom Organic's Wellbeing Pod Essential Oil Diffuser and oil blends range, **neomorganics.com**.

POSITION POWER

Poor sleep has been linked to raised levels in brain tissue of protein deposits associated with Alzheimer's disease. Although most are swept away overnight, sleeping position can determine how effectively this happens. One study showed that brain cleansing was more effective in mice that slept on their sides than on their backs.

QUIET TIME

If you're one of the 30% of people who can't snooze in silence, download the noisli app (**noisli.com app**). The soothing audio includes white, pink and brown noise – everything from a whirring fan to forest noise with birdsong – to help you unwind and nod off gradually.

RECOVERING SLEEP

Don't fret about occasional sleep deprivation, as it's lighter sleep that's lost. 'Nearly half of sleep consists of light sleep, a quarter of deep sleep and a quarter of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. If you lose sleep one night, deep and REM sleep increases the next,' says Dr Chris Idzikowski, author of *Sleep Well* (Eddison Books).

SNORING

There are approximately 15 million snorers in the UK, according to the British Snoring & Sleep Apnoea Association. Kally Sleep's Anti-Snore Pillow (**kallysleep.com**) claims to reduce the rumbles by up to 50%, thanks to its ergonomically S-shaped foam core, designed to optimise head and neck position to improve breathing.

TENSION

If you lie in bed with a tensed-up body and jaw, your sleep will suffer. 'To relax, squeeze the muscles in your feet, hold, then release; move up through your body doing the same until you reach the top of the head,' suggests Claire Dale and Patricia Peyton, authors of *Physical Intelligence* (Simon & Schuster).

URINARY URGE

One in ten people under 45 has to urinate in the night, and this increases with age. Needing a wee more than twice a night is called nocturia and can be caused by diabetes, sleep apnoea, hormonal changes, a weak pelvic floor or too much fluid before bed. If nocturia persists, see a doctor to rule out a UTI.

VIVID DREAMS

Ever wondered why we have crazy and memorable dreams? Around 25% of our night's sleep is spent in rapid eye movement (REM), the sleep stage important for learning and memory. Because brain activity is similar to that of being awake during REM, it's when we dream intensely, according to scientists. Stress, sleep deprivation, certain medications and hormone fluctuations have all been linked to more vivid dreams says the Sleep Council.

WIND-DOWN & WAKE-UP

3 sleep lamps for better bedtimes...

- Glow lamp, **casper.com**. Get the Casper Glow app to sync this lamp to your nighttime and morning routine.

- Mimics sunset and sunrise with a full-colour spectrum. Someno Sleep and Wake-Up Light, **phillips.co.uk**.

- A fading "sunset" with sleep sounds helps you unwind. Bodyclock Luxe 750DAB, **lumie.com**, has built-in wake-up sounds, too.

XEROSTOMIA

This is the medical term for a dry mouth. Saliva production can decrease by 40% as we age, and fluctuating hormones during menopause may exacerbate things. A dry mouth can disturb sleep and affect tooth and gum health. Drinking plenty during the day, sleeping with a humidifier and avoiding alcohol-based mouthwash will all help.

YESTERNIGHT

'If you're lying awake feeling the hours slip away, turn the clock away or move it to a different room if you can. Seeing time move on will increase your anxiety and keep you awake longer,' says Carole Spiers. Phenergan Night Time (**expresschemist.co.uk**) can be a short-term insomnia solution.

ZINC

This essential mineral and antioxidant is key for sleep regulation. Form's ZZZZs supplement (**formnutrition.com**) blends zinc with magnesium and the calming amino acids L-Glycine and L-Theanine for a restorative night's sleep.

WORDS: ALI HORSFALL. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

Work out what that dream means

According to research by Mental Health UK, 69% of Brits regularly suffer with nightmares, especially during times of anxiety. Almost half of these sufferers found their nightmares had recurring themes. So why does this happen, and how do we conquer it?

THE DIFFERENCE

'Sometimes a nightmare is simply a bad dream occurring in isolation with little or no emotional response from the dreamer,' says Samantha Briscoe, senior physiologist at London Bridge Hospital. 'However, a nightmare can be vivid and realistic, even disturbing. They can cause the dreamer to develop depression or anxiety, and make them afraid to sleep, which could lead to sleep disorders.'

THE CAUSE

'In general, recurring nightmares indicate the presence of unresolved mental conflict in our lives and the dream imagery can be our brain's way of processing this conflict,' says Samantha. Psychological disorders or conditions such as sleep apnoea and restless leg syndrome can also link to the increased occurrence of nightmares.

THE TREATMENT

Nightmares can be caused by certain medications too – speak to your doctor about changing your prescription or dosage. 'When nightmares are secondary to underlying conditions such as restless legs syndrome, treating the underlying disorder may alleviate the nightmares,' explains Samantha. 'If your nightmares aren't secondary to another disorder or medication related, then addressing psychological triggers is the way forward. Seeing a professional and making behavioural changes have proven effective for three quarters of adults who suffer from nightmares, including those caused by anxiety, depression and PTSD.'

MYTH BUSTER: DOES CHEESE REALLY CAUSE NIGHTMARES?

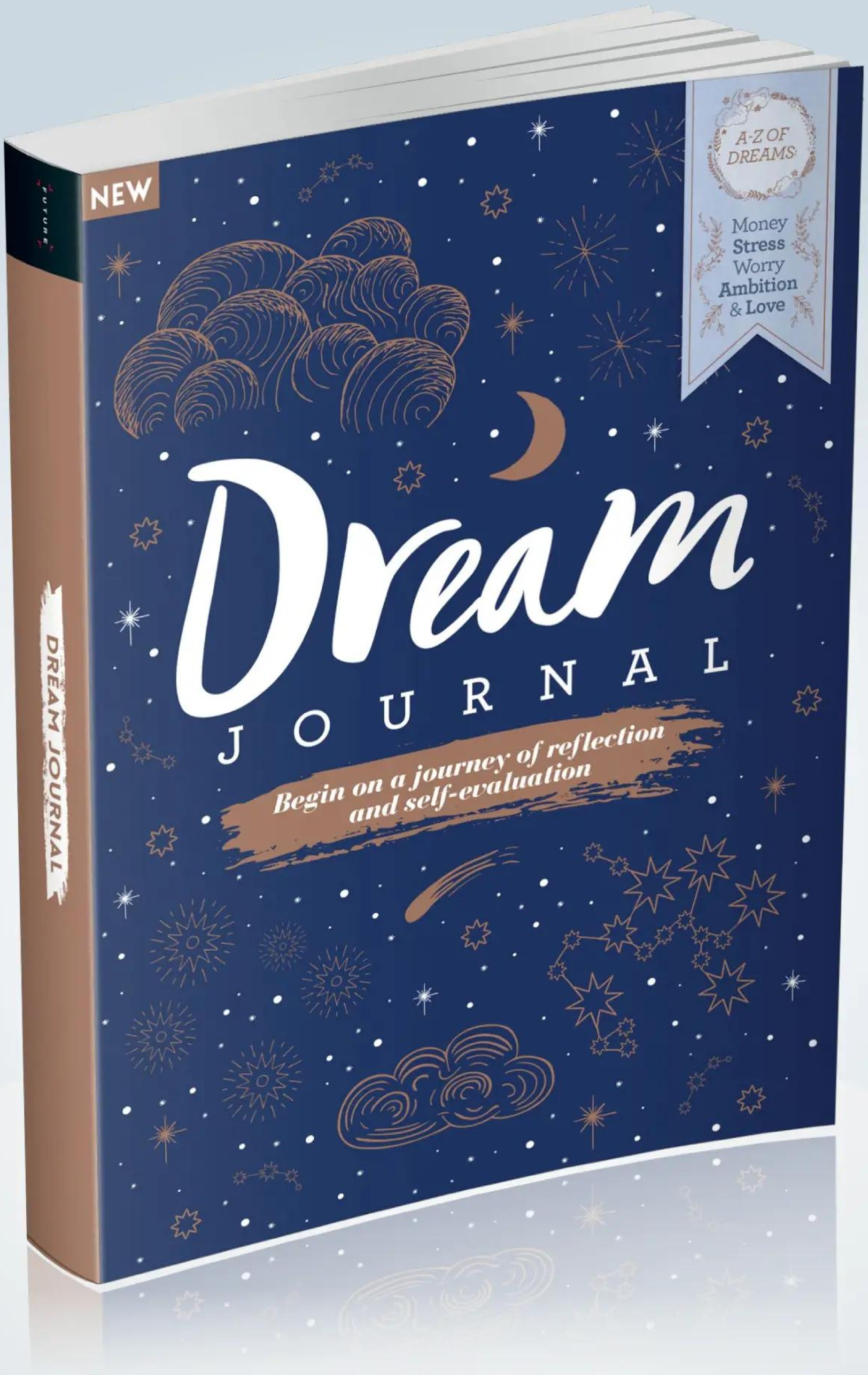
'Some people will experience nightmares after having a late-night meal or snack, which can signal the brain to be more active through an increase in our metabolic state,' says Samantha.

WORDS: EMILY JEFFERIES. PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES/CAVAN IMAGES

★ ON SALE NOW! ★

Begin on a journey of reflection & self-evaluation

Learn more about what dreaming is, and use the dream diary to record and reflect on your dreams. Freeing your mind will help you to sleep better and stop worrying about the demons that you might encounter when you drift off.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FUTURE

GRIEF HAS NO TIME LIMIT

Losing someone you are close to changes everything. Here's how grief may feel and how to get through it

Death is, of course, inevitable, but when someone you love dies, the loss of them can have huge repercussions on the rest of your life.

Operations manager for Cruse Bereavement Care Nicola Dias says, 'There is no "normal" way to grieve. There is also no timeline. Grief can take a long time.'

Stages of grief

Grieving is a normal, healthy process that we must all face. 'Everyone will feel different emotions while grieving, and also at different stages of their grief,' says Nicola. 'Numbness, guilt, relief and anger are some of the common feelings we may experience when someone close to us dies.

Along with loneliness and upset, there are other perhaps unexpected reactions you may experience:

- **Shock:** Even if the death of the person was expected, when someone who was a big part of your life dies, it can still be very shocking.
- **Overwhelmed:** You may react straightaway and not be able to stop crying, and then worry that your grief feels so devastating you don't know how you'll live with it. 'Over time, feelings of grief and loss tend to become less intense, and you begin to find a way to live with them,' says Ken Blanton, specialist counsellor at the Sue Ryder charity.
- **Relief:** This may happen if the person has been battling with a long illness, has been suffering with pain or when you have been the main carer. Relief can trigger guilt, but it's a normal reaction.
- **Anger:** This is another normal reaction, particularly if the person was taken too soon, or perhaps you hadn't seen them much or for a long time before they died. Or you may feel angry with the person for dying. Again, this is a normal reaction to grief and the feeling will pass in time.

Not just emotional

'At Cruse we find many of the people who turn to us have experienced physical health problems after they have been bereaved,' says Nicola. 'This is why talking about how you feel is so important. Not only can this lift the intense weight of grief but, over time, it can contribute to making you feel physically better.'

Physical symptoms, according to Macmillan Cancer Support, include feeling sick, difficulty sleeping, feeling exhausted, poor concentration, palpitations (fast heart rate), dizziness, a reduced appetite and weight loss.

What's the time frame?

'The length of time it takes to accept a death can vary greatly but, with time, grief and pain should lessen as we adapt, learn to live with our grief, and also cope with life without that person,' says Nicola.

Experts say that it generally takes about a year to realise how much has changed in your life. 'Some things only come up once a year, like celebrating a birthday or doing something the person who has died used to do, like renewing the car insurance. Each time one of these things happens, you are reminded of your loss, and your feelings of grief may come to the surface,' explains Ken.

It is common, especially in the first year, to have some days when you feel able to carry on, and others when you feel overwhelmed with your loss and find it hard to function at all. As time goes on, you will find you have more good days than bad as you adapt.

Getting through

'It's important that you take care of yourself following a bereavement,' says Nicola. 'One of the most helpful things is to talk about the person who has died, and your relationship with them. Who you talk to will depend on who you feel most comfortable with.

It can be challenging to share how you are feeling with someone, and you may choose family, friends, a faith or spiritual adviser, your doctore (where possible) or a support organisation.

DO:

- Talk to other people about the person who has died, and about your memories and your feelings.
- Look after yourself. Eat healthily, even if you can't eat much, and try to get enough rest, even if you can't sleep.
- Give yourself permission to grieve and as much time as you need.
- Seek support if it will help you.
- Tell people what you need, be it company, solitude or practical help.

DON'T:

- Isolate yourself (unless you have to due to illness etc).
- Keep your emotions bottled up.
- Think you're weak for needing help.
- Feel guilty for struggling to cope.
- Turn to drugs or alcohol – the relief will be temporary, but you may become addicted long-term.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

- **Cruse Bereavement Care: cruse.org.uk, freephone: 0808 808 1677** Offers face-to-face (when appropriate and possible), telephone, email and website support to those struggling with grief. Services are provided by 5,000 trained volunteers and are free. There is also pandemic-specific information.
- **Hope Again: hopeagain.org.uk, freephone 0808 808 1677** A website specifically for bereaved children and young people.
- **Macmillan Cancer Support: macmillan.org.uk, freephone: 0808 808 0000** Provides physical, financial and emotional support for those with cancer.
- **Sue Ryder: sueryder.org** Palliative, neurological and bereavement support.
- **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy: bacp.co.uk** Help with making informed choices about counselling.

It is common, especially in the first year, to have some days when you feel able to carry on, and others when you feel overwhelmed

WORDS: GEORGINA MARIC. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

How to be alone, not lonely

With more midlifers feeling the damaging effects of loneliness, connecting to others has never been so essential for health

Solitary TV dinners for one, quiet hours spent with a book in the bath, sleeping solo or simply roaming around a desperately silent house; if you have a busy family life and a thriving social circle, it's likely this alone time is much-needed bliss.

But, for the millions of people who are suffering from loneliness, solitude is a frequent source of misery that can be crippling. In fact, research suggests that a lack of social connection can be seriously bad for our health, so isn't it time we tackled the problem of loneliness?

SOLITUDE SADNESS

Shocking research* shows that half a million older people go at least five or six days a week without seeing or speaking to anyone at all.

The loneliness epidemic

It's safe to say that as a nation, people in the UK are getting lonelier. The number of over-50s experiencing loneliness is set to reach two million by 2026, a figure that will be a 49% rise in ten years.* But what's behind this isolation increase?

'There are many causes of loneliness, including bereavement, relationship breakdown, experiencing discrimination or having a highly demanding caring role,' says psychologist Dr Meg Arroll. 'Retiring, changing jobs or moving home can also cause us to feel disconnected.'

Indeed, most major life transitions can lead to loneliness in the beginning, but if these feelings continue over a period of time it can become a cause for concern. 'For loneliness to become a chronic issue, the general feeling of disconnect from others turns into symptoms akin to anxiety. This can include social anxiety, depression, insomnia, low self-worth and a heightened stress response,' explains Dr Arroll. And it's these symptoms that are seriously damaging our health.

A silent killer

Studies have revealed that loneliness can be as bad for us as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, with lonely people more likely to suffer from heart disease, dementia, depression and obesity – increasing the risk of death by 20%.

Loneliness researchers Professors John and Stephanie Cacioppo identified loneliness as powerful a biological cue as hunger or thirst, saying it acts as a signal to nourish and protect our sense of connection for long-term wellbeing and survival.

'Although loneliness is not a health condition per se, it can negatively impact mental and physical health, functional ability and quality of life,' says Dr Arroll. 'It's what we call a modifiable risk factor. If we can develop interventions to tackle loneliness, then we should be able to improve health outcomes in later life.'

82%

of pet owners said they felt less lonely after getting an animal.

The stigma of solitude

Even living with others or stacking your schedule with social activities doesn't automatically make you immune to loneliness. Some of us will still feel a sense of disconnect when surrounded by family and friends, and it's possible to feel lonely in a crowded room.

'Many people may feel embarrassed to admit they feel lonely, particularly if on the surface they have a busy and sociable life. But being around people doesn't necessarily mean someone will be protected from these feelings,' says Dr Arroll. 'You may be reluctant to say you're lonely, for fear of rebuffing others' feelings, or you may carry shame that you feel this way at all, and worry that if you tell people they will think that there's something wrong with you or that it's your fault,' she explains.

Reaching out to someone you trust and opening up about how you feel is an important first step when tackling social disconnect. Spotting the signs in others can also break down the barriers that can lead to loneliness.

Alone, not lonely

A little loneliness isn't all bad news; in fact, enjoying time in your own company and learning to sit comfortably with solitude is a great benefit of ageing.

'A significant emotional differentiation between being alone and being lonely is having the ability to feel positive and happy when alone, and to even prefer at it times. Reading, running or engaging in creative pursuits can be joyous when done alone,' says Dr Arroll.

The key is recognising when solitude is becoming detrimental to your overall health and wellbeing, and taking steps to reconnect.

How to be lonely

Feeling disconnected? A positive action plan can reframe loneliness

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Often, we're our own harshest critics, and that negative voice in our head can seem louder when we're alone. 'Be kind and approach yourself as you would a friend in need, with patience and compassion,' says Dr Arroll.

TAKE BABY STEPS

Connecting with strangers can feel daunting. 'Rather than throwing yourself in at the deep end with a big social event, start by going to places that interest you, such as a park, café or gallery, says Dr Arroll. 'Don't feel you must talk to others straightaway; just being in a new environment is a good first step.'

FOLLOW YOUR INTERESTS

Once you've built up confidence around new people, investigate local hobbies or support groups and online groups; this way you'll have a common interest to talk about.

AVOID THE TRIGGERS

Avoid alcohol and other stimulants, and limit TV time. According to Age UK, two-fifths of older people say that the television is now their main source of company, but too much passive activity can make feelings of loneliness worse.

PRACTISE SELF-CARE

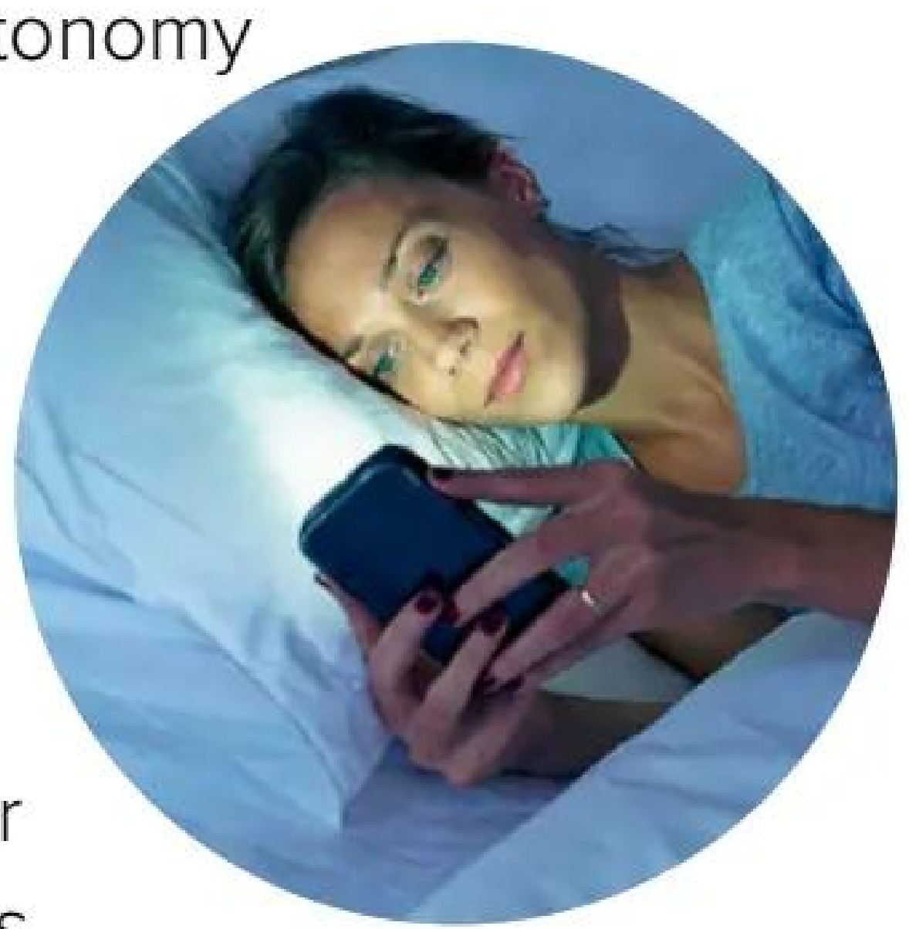
Set reminders to attend to your physical health. Walking every day is mood lifting and helps with sleep. Eating well and keeping to a routine will also boost feelings of wellbeing.

DON'T COMPARE

It's not only other people's social media feeds that can make us feel lonely. Scrolling through old posts of ourselves can result in us looking through rose-tinted glasses at our past. 'Make sure social media is used in an active manner by connecting with others, rather than passively viewing posts that portray an ideal,' suggests Dr Arroll.

SEE THE POSITIVES

If you've craved time, space and emotional autonomy in earlier decades, embrace having it now. Being alone allows you to fill your life with things you love and celebrate your freedom, resilience and self-sufficiency.



ASK FOR HELP

'If loneliness is causing you anxiety or depression, ask your GP to refer you for talking therapies, such as CBT,' says Dr Arroll. 'This helps break flawed thought patterns that can contribute to isolation and loneliness.'

WORDS: ALI HORSFALL. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY IMAGES, ALAMY. *HOLT-LUNSTAD, 2010. **ONEPOLL SURVEY FOR MARS PETCARE. ***AGE UK. DR ARROLL IS WORKING WITH HEALTHSPAN.

Phone a friend

We're all guilty of letting friendships slide in adulthood, but just half an hour a week of chatting on the phone can enhance these relationships and boost your wellbeing, says Age UK.

With recent demographic trends showing that the number of over-50s suffering from loneliness is set to reach two million by 2026, it's time to get back to basics and make that call.

SOCIAL MEDIA DOESN'T COUNT

In addition to this, a study conducted by the University of Leeds found that despite younger people having a larger social network than those in older age, these friendships tend to be less fulfilling. A generation of Facebook, texting and digital messaging has resulted in more "friends" but less intimacy, suggesting that a small group of friends you can spend time with, chat on the phone with and rely on for more than social media likes and comments, is what really makes us feel connected.

THE TRUE BENEFITS OF PHONING A FRIEND

Research published in the *Journal of Gerontology* showed that maintaining close friendships is related to cognitive functioning and physical health in old age, as a friend can help us see things from a different perspective and encourage us to get out of the house.

Compared to digital forms of communication, phoning a friend enables you to be more vulnerable. Social media can put up virtual walls; people can hide behind their positive statuses and photos when in reality they might be experiencing loneliness, anxiety and depression. The biggest benefit of calling a friend is that even if you don't want to share those feelings and experiences, they will often be able to hear it in your voice, giving you the opportunity to share and open up.

WORDS: ROSE GOODMAN. PHOTO: ALAMY

How do you spend YOURS?

The way we approach our finances can cause untold stress and hassle. Take our quiz to find out more about your relationship with money...

For each section, tick the statement that is most like you...

1 You're feeling low. Which of these most resembles what you would do?

A Go on a shopping spree – new shoes always cheer you up

B Talk to a friend

C Ask your partner if the two of you can go out for dinner that night

D Hit the gym

2 Some unexpected expenses mean you've tipped into your overdraft. What do you do?

A Nothing different – you're often in your overdraft and don't feel too concerned unless you're near the bottom of it

B You live on a shoestring until you're back in the black

C Borrow from a friend to get yourself out of it – you don't want your partner to find out

D Juggle your other bank accounts and credit cards to resolve the issue as swiftly as possible

3

A lecturer friend asks you to come in for the afternoon and tell the students about your career. She asks if you want to be paid. You tell her...

A You're happy to take whatever they can offer

B You don't need payment – after all, it's a good deed for your friend and the students

C You'll have a think – then you discuss it with your partner and come up with an amount

D Feel indignant she's asked – rather than understanding that in order to do the task properly it will take you time and effort – and calculate an amount based on how many hours you're going to spend doing it

4

A friend's 50th party is coming up and it's a smart event – what do you wear?

A A gorgeous new outfit you've bought on your credit card – money's a bit tight but you want to look your best

B You go through your old clothes to find an outfit nobody's seen for a while, even though you don't feel that good in any of them

C Talk to your partner about a budget for party outfits for both of you

D You already have good-quality, versatile clothes for occasions like this, and money set aside for treats like a new pair of shoes

5

Do you have any concerns about your financial future?

A You sometimes wake in the night worrying – you don't have savings or much of a pension – but you trust something will come up

B Yes, but you know you're frugal and can manage on very little

C Not really – you know your partner has made plans, even if you're not sure exactly what they are

D Yes, you think about it a lot – although you know you've done your best to future-proof your finances

How did you do?

Read the section for the letter you scored most highly on. If you have a fairly even mixture of two, read both descriptions to see which is most like you...

MOSTLY As

THE BIG SPENDER

✛ **YOUR MONEY ATTITUDE** You believe money's there to be spent and enjoyed, and you often shop to cheer yourself up when you're down. When you have money problems, you tell yourself something will happen to bail you out.

✛ **THE PROS** You have beautiful items that bring you pleasure.

✛ **THE CONS** This approach leaves you without savings and possibly in debt, storing up problems.

✛ **YOUR FINANCIAL FIX** 'Understand your triggers –what's been happening when you have a spree?' says Professor Karen Pine, psychologist and co-creator of Sheconomics (**sheconomics.com**). Find non-material ways to enhance your life, such as spending time with people you value*.

MOSTLY Bs

THE POVERTY ADDICT

✛ **YOUR MONEY ATTITUDE** You have a core belief that it's virtuous to have little money, and that wealth is toxic. You don't spend much on yourself, even when you can afford to.

✛ **THE PROS** You're unlikely to have to deal with the stress of debt.

✛ **THE CONS** You might be missing out on some of the genuine joys money can bring.

✛ **YOUR FINANCIAL FIX** 'Understand your beliefs and where they came from,' says Prof Pine. 'Pick a less positive belief about money – eg, going for a cheap haircut you don't like because you don't want to spend money on yourself. Ask, "If I knew this belief was untrue, how would I act?". Experiment by acting "as if" your belief was untrue.'

MOSTLY Cs

THE DEPENDENT

✛ **YOUR MONEY ATTITUDE** You tend to leave financial management up to your partner.

✛ **THE PROS** You're not controlling when it comes to finances.

✛ **THE CONS** You're putting yourself at the mercy of your partner's own patterns with finances – and leaving yourself vulnerable in the event of a relationship breakdown, illness or widowhood.

✛ **YOUR FINANCIAL FIX** Write down some of your beliefs – "Thinking about finances is boring" or "I'm useless with money". Then write down the opposing belief, such as, "Understanding money can be rewarding". Speak these new beliefs out loud until you really feel them. Tell your partner that you would like involvement in the finances.

MOSTLY Ds

THE SCRUPULOUS SAVER

✛ **YOUR MONEY ATTITUDE** You don't live beyond your means but you don't scrimp, either – you invest in quality goods that last.

✛ **THE PROS** A lot! You've planned ahead for unpredictable events. You value yourself enough to ensure you're earning what you deserve.

✛ **THE CONS** You may be just a little obsessive about finances.

✛ **YOUR FINANCIAL FIX** Let yourself enjoy money a little more. 'For a day, act the opposite of how you would normally,' says Prof Pine. Splash out on something extravagant or take a friend out to dinner. It will help you break out of your controlled approach. If you find yourself worrying about money, challenge the anxiety – after all, you've done everything you can to future-proof your finances.

WORDS: CHARLOTTE HAIGH. PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES.

*IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE WHEN YOU TRY TO STOP SHOPPING, OR ARE IN SERIOUS DEBT, SEE YOUR GP, WHO CAN REFER YOU FOR THERAPY TO LOOK AT THE ISSUES BENEATH IT

Get FINANC

If money matters leave you stressed and anxious, it's time to take the bull by the horns...

The fight for equality has come a long way, but women are still likely to be less well off than men. The gender pay gap in the UK remains at an average of 8.9% for full-time workers*, and women are less likely to have invested enough into their pension fund**, with the average female pensioner currently bringing in £7K a year less than men. Esther Mukoro, finance coach and founder of personal finance blog for women, moneynuggets.co.uk, tells us how to take control and ensure we're not missing out.

Pick up a pension

Men are still more likely to have an active private pension (56% compared to 51% of women***) and, because of the gender pay gap and natural career breaks, it's likely to be bigger, too. 'If you haven't started a private pension yet, there's no need to panic,' says Esther. 'It's never too early or too late. Firstly, ask yourself the questions, "What do I want to do in my retirement? Do I want to travel, continue working, help family, learn something new or all of these?" If you understand the purpose of your saving, it's something to work towards and it keeps you motivated. With that goal in mind, you can then work out how much you'll need when you retire and what you can do today to work towards that number.'

Esther adds that it's important to save regularly. 'Develop the habit of putting an amount away every month, then, every time you gain a pay rise, for example, add a small percentage.'

She adds: 'If you're working, you'll have been auto-enrolled onto a workplace pension; take up the offer, don't opt out. You will not miss that money from your pay after a while and

'Everyone should have an emergency fund'

IALLY FIT!

your employer will contribute to your pension, too.'

If you're in the UK, check your state pension entitlement by going to the Government's Pension Service website (gov.uk/pensionservice), and try to find all your old pensions from previous employers. 'Get in touch with your old companies and they will track them down for you,' says Esther, 'or go to the Pension Tracing Scheme, a free service that will find out if you have any schemes anywhere that you may have forgotten about or not know about.

'If you're aged 40 and under, you can take out a Lifetime ISA to save for a pension or buy your first home. However much you put in, the UK government will top it up by 25%,' explains Esther.

> 'Don't opt out of a workplace pension'

If you're just starting your pension, you can go online – PensionBee and NEST are good options – and access your account wherever you are. Or, if you want advice, the Pension Advisory Scheme is a free service for everyone.

Savvy savings

'Everyone should have an emergency fund that covers three months of living expenses,' advises Esther.

'If you struggle to save, start by building up to £1,000, then aim to cover one month's living expenses at first – this will give you a chance to do freelance work or take a temp job if you lose your job, or cover the expense if the boiler breaks or car breaks down. Then build it up to three months' worth of living expenses and put it into a savings account that you can access at any time. Always keep in mind that this is your emergency fund and is not for luxuries like holidays.'

Best investing

'A long-term investing strategy is the best way to save because it gives you a huge opportunity to grow money, which you can save for your children's university fees, the deposit for their first home – or a retirement cruise around the world!' says Esther. 'By diversifying – investing in a selection of companies – it's highly unlikely you'll lose money.'

There are two ways of investing – passive investing (or "index fund") and active investing. 'Active investing involves paying a fund manager to invest your money. But research shows that passive investing, when a computer tracks a market-weighted index or portfolio, often performs in a similar way or even better, and is low-cost. Wealthify and Vanguard Investor are worth looking at, and can start with as little as £25.'

However, the easiest tax-free way of growing money without incurring capital gains tax is with a stocks and shares ISA. You can start with just £1 and add to it.

Bin the borrowing

Be it a personal loan, credit card or overdraft, anything below £25k is unsecured debt,' says Esther. 'Debt is like a swamp, and once you're stuck in it, financial progress is impossible. Your disposable income becomes less, and that means you can't put it towards real goals, such as investing and planning for retirement.

'A brand-new car will instantly depreciate in value, unlike property, which will appreciate over the years. It's the key difference between the rich and poor. It's not that they earn more money necessarily. It's that they use it to buy assets that will appreciate in value.'

Get your fair share

If you're going through divorce and want to avoid going to court, then speaking to a mediator will help resolve your differences, so you can come to a compromise. It's important to understand the issues and know what your rights are and what you and your ex-partner want.

If you don't have children or property together, then you can do it yourself online. A Quickie Divorce costs around £300-£500 including unavoidable court fees, so can be a very cheap way of ending a marriage. But, with custody issues and joint property ownership, you will need to seek legal help. Ask for fixed divorce fees in case it gets complicated, as this will help save money if the solicitor's hours start mounting up, and check whether you're entitled to your court fees being paid if you're on maternity leave, low income or not working, for example.

QUICK FIX MONEY TIPS

+ **Quit buying daily coffees** Keep them to a once-a-week treat.

+ **Supermarket shopping** Plan meals, write a list – and don't shop hungry!

+ **Friends/family gifts** Suggest that a group of you chip in a certain amount to buy something bigger and better from all of you.

+ **Splitting bills** Work out how much your meal is, including drinks, when you order, and add 10% for the tip to make it fair.

+ **Think** Before buying anything more than £100, give yourself a 24-hour "cooling off" period.

WORDS: GEORGINA MARIC. PHOTO: GETTY. *OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STASTICS (ONS): GENDER PAY GAP IN THE UK 2019
**THE PENSIONS POLICY INSTITUTE (PPI) ***ONS: PENSION WEALTH IN GREAT BRITAIN APRIL 2016 TO MARCH 2018

Is your messy house messing with your mind?

When clutter makes you stressed, it's time to tackle the mental obstructions making you cling on to your stuff

Do you have cupboards filled with junk, wardrobes bursting with clothes and drawers crammed with all sorts of things you never use? You keep meaning to have a good clear out, but something always holds you back. You've read Marie Kondo, watched her on Netflix, you know all about only hanging on to things that "spark joy". If only you could ditch all those DVDs, books, clothes, trinkets, cards, magazines, papers, old mobiles, gadgets, takeaway flyers...

'There's owning your stuff and there's when your stuff owns you,' explains Tracy McCubbin, US based decluttering guru and author of *Making Space, Clutter Free: The Last Book on Decluttering You'll Ever Need* (Sourcebooks). 'When you've got too much clutter, constantly thinking about how you're going to manage it takes up emotional energy. If you're surrounded by "stuff" and you just can't let it go, there may be deeper, emotional issues going on.'

Having helped thousands to declutter their homes over the last 12 years, McCubbin noticed certain patterns. 'Whenever people find it really hard to get rid of things, there is inevitably an emotional root. I call these emotional clutter blocks and have identified seven that come up over and over again. Emotional clutter blocks are unconscious reasons as to why people hold onto stuff that no longer serves them.' >>

THE 7 EMOTIONAL CLUTTER BLOCKS

Which ones do you have?

1 "My stuff keeps me in the past"

You hang on to things for nostalgic reasons – photographs of when you were younger, holiday souvenirs, jeans you no longer fit into, invitations, cards, letters, sports trophies and awards, your children's old toys and paintings. There's nothing wrong with keeping a few things that elicit positive emotions of times gone by. But, if you've got boxes full of the stuff, this could be a sign that you feel your best times are behind you.

What you can do

Staying stuck in the past means you've lost sight of your future. Thinking that you've peaked and there's nothing to look forward to can be very painful. But, hanging on to objects that reinforce this view only makes things worse. You need to start creating a new vision for your future. How do you want your life to be from now on? Perhaps, you've been bereaved, lost your job or feel that life is passing you by. It could be that you might benefit from counselling or life coaching to help you move on. When you start looking forward, objects from your past will no longer have such a hold on you. **YOUR DAILY AFFIRMATION:** "Letting go of this old stuff makes space for the life I want now."

2 "My stuff tells me who I am"

Do you have clothes with tags still on them, shoes you've never worn, bags for every occasion, multiples of anything? You accumulate things to boost your sense of self. This usually emerges out of a sense of loneliness. This doesn't mean you're physically alone. It's just that deep down there's a feeling of a lack of connection. So, you shop to try and give your life meaning, to create an identity you don't really feel.

What you can do

Shopping and collecting stuff is basically a distraction for the emptiness you feel inside. A good way to let go is to gradually replace "things" with more meaningful interactions. This could mean joining a local volunteering group, enrolling on a course and making new friends. The more emotionally fulfilled you feel, the less you'll need to fill the void with shopping and possessions.

YOUR DAILY AFFIRMATION:
"I can meaningfully connect with people without acquiring anything. I am a valuable person without any possessions at all."

3 "The stuff I'm avoiding"

This is the "clutter" you just can't face – the bills, unopened mail, bank and credit card statements, forms, unfinished projects and other paperwork that are stuffed into drawers and boxes. They might be out of sight, but just thinking about all the admin that you need to do makes you feel slightly queasy. So, you do bits sporadically or put off dealing with it altogether.

What you can do

This emotional block is caused by fear. You need to ask yourself what it is you're afraid of. Perhaps you have debts, haven't filed your tax return or you've simply got into a mess with your admin. The best way to deal with paper clutter is to just confront it. If it helps, invite someone over for moral support. The fear is worse than the reality. There's always a solution. If it's debts, you can arrange a payment plan. Out-of-date paperwork can be shredded and binned. The sooner you face it, the sooner you sort it. **YOUR DAILY AFFIRMATION:** "I have power over my papers. They have no power over me. Done is better than perfect."

4 "My fantasy stuff for my fantasy life"

This is the one where you're constantly waiting for your life to begin. So, you keep clothes for when you lose weight, go on that magical trip to Bali or throw the perfect party. You've got the brand new workout kit, yoga mat and exercise equipment you've never assembled. You buy things for your intended fantasy life. But the reality is that there's a disconnect with the life you're actually living.

What you can do

You need to switch your mindset from acquisition to action. What's more important – buying new yoga kit, or actually taking the class? The trick here is to work out what it is you can do today, to move you closer to your dreams. Donate all your "thin" clothes to charity and buy yourself one or two great outfits that fit you now. Sell the exercise equipment on eBay and start walking every day. Live in the present and you'll find it easier to let go of the fantasy clutter you never use.
YOUR DAILY AFFIRMATION: "Stuff will not get me there. Action will get me there."

WORDS: EVA GIZOWSKA. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO, TI-MEDIACONTENT.COM

5

“I’m not worth my good stuff”

You’ve got cupboards of beautiful fancy china, pots, pans, glasses, expensive scented candles, soaps, bed linen, designer clothes, shoes and bags – all reserved for special occasions. Yet, for every day you use the plain, functional items and dress in the same old, comfortable joggers and baggy tops. This signals that you don’t feel worthy enough of the good stuff. It also suggests you’re a bit of a perfectionist, where everything has to be just right before you can use all your lovely things.

What you can do

You need to stop living in the grey zone and start celebrating each day. Ditch the worn, boring sweatpants and baggy T-shirts, and start wearing your new clothes instead. You don’t have to look like a bag lady every time you pop to the shops. Throw out the old and start using the good stuff. Dress in clothes that make you feel great. Start treating yourself like someone who matters. **YOUR DAILY AFFIRMATION:** “Use the good stuff. Today is worth celebrating!”

6

Trapped with other people’s stuff

You haven’t got a problem with your own stuff, it’s other people’s clutter that you can’t get rid of. This is very common and happens when things get passed down through the family. You never use the four sets of china dinner services, tea sets, sewing boxes, antique furniture, dusty old books, silverware and jewellery, yet nostalgia stops you from getting rid of anything. As a result, your place is beginning to look like a museum more than a home.

What you can do

Just because a book or painting was important to someone else doesn’t mean you have to keep it for life. You’re not being disloyal if you let it go. It’s natural to want to hold on to things that remind you of someone you loved. But you can still honour their memory in other ways. For example, let the dinner set go and make your grandmother’s favourite recipe instead. Keep one or two objects and take photographs of the rest.

YOUR DAILY AFFIRMATION:

“I can love and hold their memory and still let go of their things.”

7

“The stuff I paid a lot for”

If you’ve forked out the equivalent of a week’s salary on a pair of shoes, handbag or designer dress, getting rid of such high-value items can seem like a terrible waste of money. So, you kid yourself that you might use it sometime in the future. Or that you just don’t want it to go to waste. But the reality? These extravagant buys are still cluttering up your wardrobe ten years on.

What you can do

Realise that we all make mistakes. There’s no point prolonging the agony. Every time you look at an object, it’s a reminder that you should use it. Only you don’t, do you? Chances are you don’t even like it. The best tactic is to give it to someone who will use it. So, pass it on to a friend, a charity shop or a woman’s refuge. There’s nothing more satisfying than knowing something has gone to a good home.

YOUR DAILY AFFIRMATION: “It’s okay that I made a mistake. My home is not an orphanage for unused objects. I can let this go to someone who will actually use it. Or even throw it away, and I am still a good person.”

CALM MIND

Too much clutter raises stress levels. In one US study (reported in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2010), it was found that those who lived surrounded by clutter were more likely to feel depressed, stressed and tired.

EXPERT ADVICE

Be more Marie Kondo, the Japanese organising guru...

✢ Tackle categories not rooms. The five main categories are: clothes, books, papers/documents, komono (miscellaneous items) and sentimental items.

✢ Work through one category at a time.

✢ Place all the clothes you have on your bed, and books and paperwork on a table – this makes it easier to sort through.

✢ Fold scarves, dresses, tops etc, and stack them vertically in your drawers.

✢ Place boxes in drawers to makes it easier to get at things you’ll need.

✢ Show gratitude for each item before getting rid of it.

Discovering a new way of self-soothing – be it with an activity or natural medication – can swiftly reduce stress levels. So what will suit you best?

Learning to RELAX

Relaxation is an essential addition to our wellbeing toolkit, but it's not always easy to accomplish, especially in challenging circumstances. But learning to do it right could give your health a much-needed boost.

'Relaxation is vital to our health and wellbeing, as well as our immune function,' says natural health and wellness expert Dr Tim Bond. 'Researchers at Harvard Medical School discovered that in people practising relaxation methods, such as yoga and meditation, far more "disease-fighting genes" were active, compared to those who didn't practise. In particular, they found genes were switched on that help to protect from disorders such as pain, infertility, high blood pressure and even rheumatoid arthritis.'

And that's not all. The art of relaxation also drives higher levels of feel-good chemicals, such as serotonin and growth hormones, which repair cells and tissue. 'In essence, relaxation has virtually the opposite effect to stress, lowering heart rate, boosting immunity and enabling the body to thrive,' says Dr Bond. 'An example is when women menstruate, they often find taking a long bath or doing some gentle relaxation exercises helps their general wellbeing.'

Sounds great, but our hectic lives often prevent us from finding – and utilising – what's best for us. In order to move away from the sympathetic (fight or flight) response and activate the parasympathetic (rest and digest) response, we must trust our instincts and choose what produces the most satisfaction. 'It's about finding out what's right for you,' says Dr Megan Jones Bell, chief science officer at Headspace (headspace.com). 'Breathing can be a powerful way to help us reset and activate our natural relaxation response, so one of the easiest and most accessible ways for anyone to relax, in any setting, environment or activity, is to focus on the breath.'

As well as spending time in nature, playing with animals, getting a massage, and praying or meditating, here are some quick and effective ways to put you back on the path to wellness.

The art of... *creating*

Creating can be anything, from taking an art class or colouring in, to crafts or jigsaw puzzles. These forms of active mediation allow us to settle our overworked brains and focus on the here and now. 'Art has the power to heal, increase wellbeing and reduce anxiety. Researchers liken creating art to exercise for the brain, and studies consistently show that creating art helps individuals cope with stressful and difficult situations,' says Scott Phillips, co-founder of Rise Art (riseart.com).

Even doodling is beneficial. Writing in *Psychology Today* (psychologytoday.com), Cathy Malchiodi, PhD, says: 'The wonderful thing about doodling is that it is a whole-brain activity – self-soothing, satisfying, exploratory and mindful.'

The art of... *yogic breathing*

Brighton-based yoga practitioner Danny Griffiths (yoga-fit.co.uk) recommends alternate nostril breathing, called nadi shodhana pranayama. It activates the parasympathetic response,

The art of... *sound therapy*

Sound therapy, such as drumming, singing, chanting and gong baths, has been used for centuries to help people enter a more relaxed, meditative state, and promote wellbeing and healing. Now, thanks to modern technology, there's a new-ish kid on the block – binaural beats.

Through headphones, listeners receive a different sound frequency to each ear, which the brain interprets as a particular rhythmic frequency. These sounds create specific neural responses that, depending on the frequency, induce one of five brainwave states that can aid sleep and ease pain (delta brainwaves), help you relax or meditate (theta), reduce stress (alpha), improve concentration and focus (beta), and enhance memory (gamma).

Look up binaural beats on YouTube or sign in to Spotify and search for "the most relaxing songs ever according to science". Backed by neuroscientists, it's so effective that it's strongly recommended you don't drive while tuning in.

strengthening the immune system and providing quick relief from stress.

She says, 'I do this before classes, as I find it really relaxing and calming. It's meant to balance the "ida" and "pingala" nadis (channels) or the yin and the yang.' Explaining how to do it, she says, 'Sit up straight in a cross-legged position with your left hand resting on your thigh, exhale completely then use your right thumb to close your right nostril. Inhale for four to five seconds through your left nostril then close this nostril with your ring finger and exhale for four to five seconds through your right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril then close it with your thumb and breathe out through the left nostril. Repeat for three to five minutes. Finish on the left nostril.'

While this type of breathing can be done at any time, it's worth combining with yoga. 'Yoga is more of a work-in than work-out,' says Danny. 'Classes are meditative as we move from posture to posture, and for some students it's the only time they can switch off. After concentrating on how the body feels in the moment, there's no denying the state of relaxation at the end of practice.'

The art of... *organising*

If your mother ever said "tidy house, tidy mind", she wasn't just trying to persuade you to clean your room – the chances are she recognised the positive effects of an ordered environment. And, with many of us taking staycations, it's more important than ever to create a Zen home.

Research has shown that working up a sweat while cleaning improves mental health and boosts mood, while Japanese organising consultant Marie Kondo waxes lyrical about "a comfortable environment, a space that feels good to be in, a place where you can relax" in her bestseller *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (PB, Vermilion).

The art of... *ASMR*

For those who enjoy Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR), the experience can be nothing short

> With more of us taking staycations, it's important to create a Zen home

of profound. ASMR enthusiasts love the de-stressing effects of listening to sounds, such as whispering, eating, a cat purring or rainfall, or by watching kinetic sand or soap being sliced, or even pimples being popped.

The theory behind these stimuli is the release of feel-good chemicals – endorphins, dopamine, oxytocin and serotonin – into our bodies, which decrease stress and aid relaxation and sleep. 'ASMR is consistently helpful at bringing comfort, peace and calmness to busy brains when an overactive mind is preventing a desired feeling of calmness. While it can't cure or prevent any form of illness, it may help reduce feelings of stress or sleeplessness,' explains Dr Craig Richard, founder of ASMR University (asmruniversity.com).

The art of... *natural self-medicating with cannabidiol*

If you self-medicate with alcohol or drugs, try a natural approach instead – it's better for your body and mental state. 'Quality, tested CBD [cannabidiol] oil like DragonflyCBD (dragonflycbd.com) has been found to bust anxiety and stress, and help users, along with other self-care tips, to get to that deep relaxation state,' explains Dr Bond. 'Evidence from studies has shown that CBD has anti-anxiety effects, may regulate learned fear, and appears to reduce the cardiovascular response to models of stress and reduce resting blood pressure,' he adds.

The art of... *salt bathing*

Salt baths have long been regarded as an elixir to combat stress and encourage relaxation, and the secret lies in magnesium. 'Individuals who suffer with mental-health illnesses have been found to have lower platelet serotonin levels,' explains Karen Davis, Westlab chief pharmacist (westlabsalts.co.uk). 'There are different ways to increase serotonin, including magnesium intake,' she adds. 'This is best absorbed through the skin.'

That's why a soak in a bath filled with salts rich in magnesium, such as Dead Sea, Epsom or Himalayan salts, is advised. 'This will not only help to calm and de-stress the mind and body, but also improve mood,' Karen explains.

The art of... *everyday mindfulness*

Contrary to popular belief, mindfulness isn't about sitting quietly and meditating, which can take time and practice. 'We can introduce relaxation into our daily life by simply trying to be more mindful in our everyday tasks,' explains Dr Jones Bell. 'This could be as simple as mindful hand-washing, making a cup of tea or taking moments to pause and check in with yourself. Rather than getting lost in the frustration of a task, acknowledge it, accept it, sit with it, focus on your breathing and bring your attention back to how you're feeling and why. This will help you be intentional in every interaction and can bring about a more relaxed state of being,' she says.

The art of... *neo-Luddism*

For those of us attached to our phones and laptops, a little neo-Luddism goes a long way, because if you're constantly distracted by your phone or emails you'll never relax. Neo-Luddites reject modern technology and so can you. 'Give it a go, even for an hour, and see what difference it makes,' says burnout coach Rosie Millen (missnutritionist.com). 'We live in a comparative age, which is not healthy. From the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed we are reminded of what everyone is doing and achieving in every 24-hour window. This emphasises the need to switch off to get in touch with real life.'

DO YOU SUFFER FROM RELAXATION REMORSE?

Dr Christine Langhoff, clinical psychologist and director of Circle Psychology Partners in south London (circlepsychologypartners.co.uk), explains why we sometimes feel guilty just taking it easy...

'It can come from many places, including our upbringing, schooling, religion, the media and cultural expectations,' says Dr Langhoff.

'Our lives have become increasingly busy with both real and perceived pressures that, for many, have led to perfectionism.

'Whilst striving for high standards is not a bad thing, overly focusing on them increases stress levels and the pressure on ourselves.'

Christine's tips:

✢ Remember that relaxing is an important part of staying physically and mentally healthy.
✢ What we find relaxing is subjective – what works for you may not for another. Bear this in mind if you tend to compare yourself to others.
✢ Be kind to yourself. It can be hard – but, with practice, relaxing becomes easier.
✢ Set aside allocated time to relax, even if you feel you "don't deserve it" or "have too much to do". This could be anything from taking a yoga class to taking regular short breaks.

WORDS: DEBRA WATERS. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY IMAGES

RELAX It's as easy as breathing

You breathe 22,000 times a day, and by doing it mindfully, you can free yourself from stress

Your breath is the greatest asset you have. Of course, its primary function is to keep us alive by bringing oxygen into your body. But it is also naturally meditative. It reflects your most powerful emotions and if you learn to understand it, can either soothe or harness them. There is an art to breathing correctly, and it's one that many of us have forgotten.

HOW BREATHING WORKS

Breathing relies on the big, powerful muscles of the diaphragm, the abdomen and the intercostal muscles that lie between the ribs. It is helped along by the smaller secondary muscles of the neck, shoulders and upper ribs.

When you are upset, anxious or stressed, the abdomen tenses and prevents the big primary muscles from working. Instead, they begin tugging against each other, leaving the secondary muscles to do all the work. But the secondary muscles are only designed to shoulder 20% of the burden, so they become stressed.

If this continues, it can lead to chronic tension in the shoulders and neck, headaches and fatigue, and increasingly shallower breathing. It's a vicious cycle that lies behind much of our anxiety, stress and unhappiness. But there is an equally powerful virtuous cycle that you can cultivate by learning the art of breathing.

It's at the heart of mindfulness and as old as meditation itself. You can learn the basics in just a few minutes, although mastering it takes a little longer.

UNDERSTANDING MINDFULNESS AND YOUR MIND

Mindfulness is simply full, conscious awareness of whatever thoughts, feelings and emotions are flowing through your mind, body and breath without judging or criticising them in any way. It is being fully aware of whatever is happening in the present moment.

The aim of mindfulness is not to clear the mind of thoughts. It is to understand how your mind works. It teaches you to observe how your thoughts and feelings rise and fall like waves. And in the calm spaces lie moments of piercing insight.

You come to learn that happiness is fleeting, while unhappiness lingers. Psychologists call it the negativity bias. It skews perception and makes the world seem far harsher than it actually is. The negativity bias ensures that it takes five positive experiences to balance a single negative one. It's no more difficult than tuning into the breath while paying attention to the little pleasures of daily life. It means noticing the sights, sounds, smells and textures that surround you, and soaking up the tastes and aromas of everything you consume. And while you do so, gently remind yourself that most of life's difficulties are only half as bad as they appear, while the good things are two or three times as intense.

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

Through mindfulness, you will come to learn that thoughts, feelings and emotions are created by the body as much as the brain. It's called embodied cognition.

A fleeting moment of stress, for example, creates tension in the body. The brain senses this and interprets it as stress. The body tenses a little more, breathing becomes a little shallower, the brain feels more stressed. It's a downward spiral.

Mindful breathing will teach you that your most powerful states of mind are reflected in the body as physical sensations. Anxiety might appear as nausea. Stress as a headache. Depression might trigger physical pain – a broken heart, perhaps. Be aware of these sensations – each one is a message.

If you consciously listen to these messages by actively feeling them in your body, you'll realise that they rise and fall like your breath. And before long they'll begin to melt away, leaving behind a calmer, happier and more insightful mind.

MEDITATE UNDER THE STARS

You'll probably spend 36 minutes worrying today (most people do). Perspective dissolves worry. Instead of worrying, why not go outside and breathe? Even better, gaze at the stars.

Take off your shoes and socks. Feel the ground beneath your feet. Look upwards. Breathe. See the stars streaming off into infinity in every direction.

Focus on your breath. Feel the cool night air washing over you. Look at the stars… those twinkles may have taken billions of years to reach you.

Breathe… love the arriving of the light… breathe.

✱ *The Art of Breathing* by Dr Danny Penman (HQ) is out now. He is also co-author of the 1.5 million-selling book, *Mindfulness*.

Try this little mindful breathing meditation

All you need is a chair, a body, some air, your mind… that's it

✱ Sit on a straight-backed chair. Place your feet flat on the floor, your spine 2-3cm from the back of the chair.

✱ Be comfortable, with a relaxed but straight back. Place your hands loosely in your lap. Close your eyes.

✱ Focus your mind on your breath as it flows in and out. Feel the sensations the air makes. Feel the rise and fall of your chest and stomach.

✱ Where are the strongest feelings? Nose, mouth, throat, stomach, chest, shoulders? Pay attention and explore the feelings. Don't try to alter them in any way.

✱ When your mind wanders, bring it back to your breath. Be kind to yourself. Minds wander. It's what they do. Realising that your mind has wandered and bringing it back to your breath *is* the meditation. It's a little moment of mindfulness.

✱ After five or ten minutes, gently open your eyes and take in what you can see, hear, feel and smell.

You can download or stream this Breathing Meditation from franticworld.com/aob

WORDS: DR DANNY PENMAN. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

A beginner's guide to MEDITATION

In our workaholic society, meditation can be a saviour. No idea where to start? Lululemon meditation ambassador Jody Shield shares seven easy steps...

1 Go to a quiet, comfortable place where you won't be disturbed. A comfy chair will do. Sit down but don't lie down, as it might make you fall asleep.

2 Close your eyes and place your hand over the centre of your chest – your "energetic heart centre".

3 Take a deep breath into your chest. Observe how the hand rises and space is created inside you. As you breathe out, notice how the hand falls and your body folds and softens.

4 Keep breathing in and out, and get used to connecting your breath to your hand over your heart's centre, and the feeling of your chest rising and falling.

5 Rather than controlling your breath, imagine yourself standing back and observing it.

6 Stay like this for a few minutes. As other thoughts come into your head, see them, observe them and notice them – but let them pass gently by without engaging with them.

7 Don't judge yourself if you lose focus. Notice when you wander off, and gently move your focus back to your hand over your heart's centre, rising and falling.

TOP TIP!

Realise there's no "right" way to meditate... 'There's your way, and that's the best way,' explains Jody. 'It's a practice, so it's something you get better at the more you do it. Telling ourselves we're not doing it right or we're not good enough at meditating is a common barrier.'

WHY DO IT? BECAUSE MEDITATION...

- *Helps to regulate emotions and reduce stress*
- *Improves divergent thinking – a style of thinking that encourages creativity and new ideas*
- *Increases compassion*
- *Improves focus and concentration*
- *Manages anxiety*
- *Helps you clear out the past*
- *Helps you to sleep well*
- *Helps you reset*

WORDS: EMILY JEFFERIES. PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

Find your mantra

Positive affirmations really do have the power to transform your thinking. Here, mindfulness practitioner Sarah Rudell Beach* shows us how to make a mantra work for you.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Mantras are words and phrases that can focus your mind and reverse negative thought patterns. 'You can silently repeat them in your head whenever you need them throughout the day, or say them out loud if you find it helpful,' says Sarah. 'Once you discover the mantras that most resonate with you, write them down on a post-it, or on your favourite stationery, and put them where you will see them regularly such as on a mirror or your fridge.'

SAY IT WITH EASE

When choosing an affirmation, it should feel comfortable and appropriate for the internal thoughts that you want to quieten. "I don't need to be perfect", "I will look for the good", or "I will focus on what I can control", are good examples. 'If a mantra doesn't feel right to you,' says Sarah, 'modify it'.

TRY THESE POWER PHRASES DURING YOUR DAY

MORNING AFFIRMATION: 'I'll handle what today brings'
'When we get upset because things don't go to plan, it's often because we weren't aware of our plan in the first place,' says Sarah. Think about what you're expecting today, so you can skilfully meet the moments that don't deliver.

MIDDAY REMINDER: 'I can do this'
When things get tough during your day, repeat this mantra. 'You've done hard things before. Know that whatever it is you're facing, you already have everything you need to handle it,' Sarah explains. 'You have your presence, your attention, and your breath. You've got this.'

EVENING MANTRA: 'I did my best today'
Use this mantra before bed. 'Reflect on what was good,' says Sarah, 'what was hard, and who you helped or who helped you'.

WORDS: ALI HORSFALL. PHOTO: ALAMY. *AUTHOR OF *AND BREATHE...* (£7.99, CICO)

Boost your *BODY,* work your *MIND*

Ramp up your strength and flexibility while restoring calm, with this multi-tasking yoga plan. Plus, it only takes 15 minutes

Yoga isn't just a one-trick workout pony. Don't get us wrong, we love its restorative effects – in fact, with hectic schedules and high-intensity workouts (think running, cycling, Zumba) dominating our lives, it's probably something we could all do with a little bit more. But this ancient practice has so much more to offer.

'Yoga is a great way to calm down – even a short session can help reduce stress, increase blood flow around our body and clear our mind – but with more than 80 styles to choose from, it's also a full fitness programme offering strength, flexibility and cardio too,' says Lucy Edge, yoga advocate, author and self-dubbed yogipreneur.

These revitalising 15-minute sessions, created by Lucy, are a great addition to your regular workout routine. 'They'll help increase focus during a busy week, prevent injury by strengthening and lengthening muscles safely, and are worth a dozen sit-ups when it comes to targeting your core,' says Lucy.

SHORT AND SO SWEET YOGA

Your trainer, Lucy Edge

» 'Research has shown you don't have to spend hours on your mat to reap the benefits,' says Lucy. Try these 15-minute sessions, which each have a different focus.

MASTER THE MOVES

SUN SALUTATION A – FLEXIBILITY

» **Mountain Pose** Stand with feet together.

» **Raised Arms Pose** Inhaling, stretch hands above head, fingers pointing up and palms together, lengthening through the spine.

» **Forward Fold** Exhale to a forward fold, bending knees if needed. Inhale.

» **The Plank** Exhaling, jump or walk back to a plank, lower to your mat.

» **Upward-facing Dog** Inhale, palms beneath shoulders, raising hips off floor, stretching head and neck gently upwards.

» **Downward-facing Dog** Exhaling, tuck toes under and bring hips up to form an inverted V. Take three breaths. Look forward and step to the top of your mat.

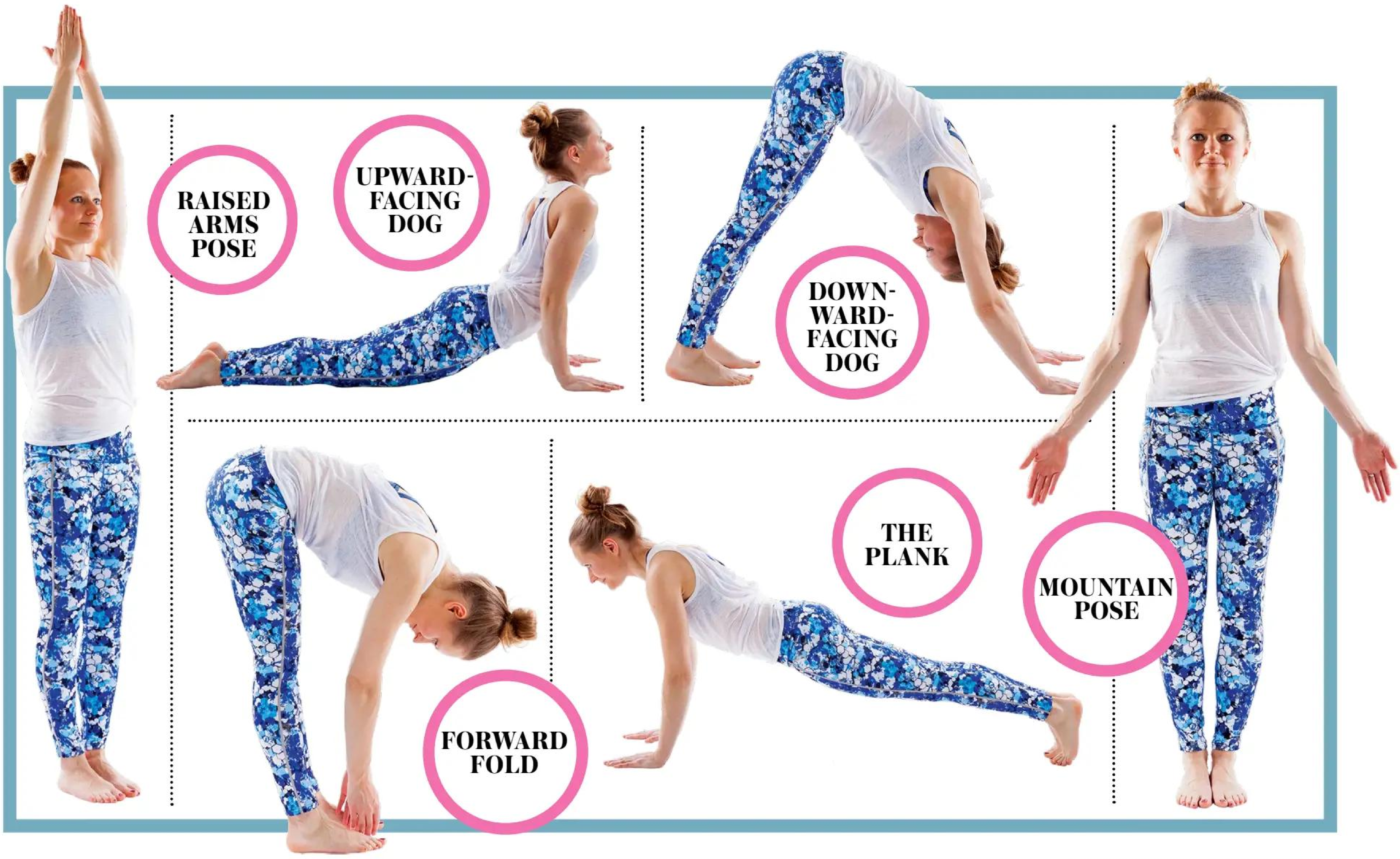
» **Raised Arms Pose** Inhaling, raise hands above head, gently lengthening through your neck and back.

» **Mountain Pose** Exhaling, return hands to your sides.

SUN SALUTATION B – STRENGTH

» Like Sun Salutation A, adding two new poses for strength and endurance.

After Forward Fold, exhale as you bend knees, as if lowering into a chair,



sitting back to see your toes. Keep spine long and reach through fingertips. Draw shoulder blades back and down.

» Warrior 1 After Downward-facing Dog, inhale, turning left foot 45° angle and step right foot to front of mat. Exhale, squaring pelvis and sternum to front of mat. Bend right knee to 90° (in line with middle toe). Reach arms above head, lifting rib cage, opening chest. » Return to Downward-facing Dog and repeat on other side.

» Return to front of mat for Raised Arm Pose and Mountain Pose.

MOON SALUTATION – CALM

» As Sun Salutation A, adding one new pose and a breathing exercise for calm.

» Equestrian Pose After Forward Fold, exhale as you step back with right leg, and lower knee to mat. Hold head up, raising hands above head. Repeat on other side.

» Alternate Nostril Breathing Sit with crossed legs. Rest left hand on left knee. Exhale, then use thumb of right hand to close right nostril and inhale through left one. Close left nostril, pause, then open and exhale through right one. Repeat, alternating nostrils after each inhalation.

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3
WEEK 1	**(Sun Salutation A – Flexibility)** Hold each pose for 5 breaths (5 inhales and 5 exhales). Do 3 rounds. Rest for 1 minute between each round.	**(Sun Salutation B – Strength)** Hold each pose for 5 breaths. Do 3 rounds. Rest for 1 minute between each round.	**(Moon Salutation – Calm)** Do 3 rounds. Rest for 1 minute between each round. Finish with breathing exercise. Hold the pause between nostrils for a count of 1.
WEEK 2	**(Sun Salutation A – Flexibility)** Repeat as Week 1 but do 5 rounds. Reduce rest time between rounds to 30 seconds.	**(Sun Salutation B – Strength)** Repeat as Week 1, but do 5 rounds. Reduce rest time between rounds to 30 seconds.	**(Moon Salutation – Calm)** Repeat as Week 1, but do 5 rounds. Reduce rest time between rounds to 30 seconds. Finish with breathing exercise. Hold pause for a count of 3.
WEEK 3	**(Sun Salutation A – Flexibility)** Do 8 rounds and reduce rest time between rounds to 15 seconds.	**(Sun Salutation B – Strength)** Do 8 rounds and reduce rest time between rounds to 15 seconds.	**(Moon Salutation – Calm)** Do 8 rounds and reduce rest time between rounds to 15 seconds. Finish with breathing exercise. Hold pause for a count of 5.
WEEK 4	**(Sun Salutation A – Flexibility)** Do 10 rounds with no rest in between.	**(Sun Salutation B – Strength)** Do 10 rounds with no rest in between.	**(Moon Salutation – Calm)** Do 10 rounds with no rest in between. Finish with breathing exercise and hold pause for count of 5.

WORDS: NATALIA LUBOMIRSKI. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES. VISIT LUCY'S WEBSITE AT YOGACLICKS.COM

Go for a mindful run

This isn't just any old run – it could be the secret to reducing stress levels and boosting cognitive performance. Fitness and wellbeing coach Natasha Wood explains more…

MORE THAN JUST A JOG

While running is good for your physical health, it can also do wonders for your mental health. 'Running and mindfulness really go hand in hand – when you're running down that open road there's really no one else but you and your mind so it's a great opportunity to actively focus your thoughts,' says Natasha. 'It lowers stress levels, helps you feel happier, improves performance mentally, reduces pain and decreases anxiety and depression symptoms.'

4 MINDFUL STEPS

1 Start by setting an intention in the first few minutes of your run, then completely let it go. You may have the intention to get a promotion at work, or to stop comparing yourself to others.

2 Become aware of both your breathing and your physical movement. Focus your breath in a way that supports your body and overall run technique.

3 As you get into a deep state of awareness, just become the observer of your thoughts, what stories play out in the mind – don't try to change anything, just run with it and become aware.

4 It's with this awareness that over time a deep sense of calm sets in – this is one of the huge benefits of mindful running. As well as becoming clearer in your thoughts and actions, you're able to process things more effectively and efficiently. You will feel happier, calmer and more grounded while improving your overall performance both in and out of work, as well as stamina and positivity.

For more, visit mindfulrunning.org.

WORDS: EMILY JEFFERIES. PHOTOS: GETTY

Get in the garden

When the going gets tough, head outside for mind and body benefits says horticultural therapist Deb Hoskin*.

THE POWER OF NATURE

Ecotherapy – or green care – is the therapeutic benefit gained from engaging with the outdoors. 'There's evidence that nature-based activities can heal and enhance wellbeing,' says Deb. 'When there is emotional pain or disconnection, the garden is a space to simply "be". Get closer to nature and you'll find that nature changes you for the better.'

FITNESS BENEFITS

Digging, mowing and weeding burn as many calories as a fitness class. 'The exercise and fresh air supports the whole body and releases feel-good chemicals and hormones,' says Deb.

4 WAYS TO GET GARDEN GOODNESS

1 **Start a project** This could be big or small, but it will motivate you to get outside. Ideas include starting a vegetable patch or growing a vertical flower wall.

2 **Create a quiet space** Place a bench at the bottom of the garden, or pop a table and chairs in a sun-filled corner – somewhere that you can visit to unwind.

3 **Have a herb garden** Grow pots of fragrant, healing herbs that you can use in your kitchen.

4 **No outside space?** Create green zones of houseplants indoors. Water and care for them as part of your daily routine.

WORDS: ALI HORSFALL. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES
*HORTICULTURAL THERAPY TRUST

7 reasons NATURE IS GOOD FOR YOU

The great outdoors doesn't just feel good for you – it really is. Here's how nature is scientifically proven to help health and wellbeing

Woodland walks, pottering in the garden, and being kissed by the sun's rays all have the potential to improve our mood. Have you noticed that you tend to feel worse when cooped up inside? So, it's no wonder that women head outdoors to heal everything from midlife heartbreak and menopausal anxiety, to more serious mental health conditions. This medicinal form of nature is known as ecotherapy, and there's scientific evidence to support its success.

1 NATURE'S PRESCRIPTION

Ecotherapy covers a broad range of nature-based activities that can enhance health, explains Jess Bayley, ecotherapist and project manager at The Centre for Ecotherapy (centreforecotherapy.org.uk). 'It's the conscious recognition that being in nature is effective in improving our wellbeing and that it develops people's connection to themselves and the natural environment.' And this ethos is backed by the medical profession. Ecotherapy is now being used as a social prescription, with the NHS making referrals from mental health centres and rehabilitation units. Some people will go through life without ever suffering psychologically and they won't experience vulnerability, says Jess. For others, mounting stress, work issues, bereavements or relationship problems can take a toll. 'Mental health issues can creep up and break a person's resilience. That's when you can find solace in the natural world,' she says.

2 INTO THE WILD

With hectic lifestyles that see us rarely alone, escaping to the wilderness can restore calm and build resilience. One study in *Health Promotion International* found that wild, solo adventures develop coping skills, sensitivity to the environment, and a sense of freedom that can increase general wellbeing. 'Visit a deserted beach on a stormy day and be lifted by the power of the sea,' suggests Jess. 'Or find a wide, open space and allow the natural energy of the wind to affect you.'

3 EMBRACE THE ELEMENTS

Submerging yourself in cold water sounds brutal, but there are healthy rewards. The father of medicine, Hippocrates, used cold bathing in his treatment of serious illnesses, and recent studies show it can reduce inflammation, improve circulation, increase energy and trigger feel-good chemicals in the brain. Wim Hof, aka the Ice Man, champions this therapy and, through a combination of cold water immersion and breathing techniques, claims his method can influence the body's entire nervous system (wimhofmethod.com).

✢ **TEMPTED TO TAKE A DIP?**
Find your local wild swim spot to try cold water swimming. 'It's shown to boost our immune system through increasing our white blood cell count,' says Blue Health Coach Lizzi Larbalestier (goingcoastal.blue). Visit outdoorswimmingsociety.com for tips on doing it safely.

WORDS: ALI HORSFALL. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO.
*RESEARCH AT UNIVERSITY OF EXETER MEDICAL SCHOOL.
**NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV/PUBMED/18394317

4 THE POWER OF THE SEA

We're drawn to water for recreation and restoration – even a coastal walk can affect mental health, says Lizzi. 'Ocean therapy is the psychological benefit of spending time, and learning new skills, in blue space,' she explains. 'Swimming, diving or sailing allows you to fully harness the social, emotional, cognitive and physical benefits of the sea.' Evidence shows that proximity to water positively impacts breathing and heart rate, and creates a positive mood thanks to a release of "pleasure" neurochemicals such as oxytocin and dopamine. 'In blue space, internal chatter quietens, awareness of time shifts and we become mindful of our connection with the wider world,' says Lizzi.

TONIC WATER
Spending just two hours a week by the coast can be beneficial for mental health.*

5 PRAISE THE RAYS

Some sun exposure is vital for good health. On sunny days, the brain produces more serotonin that can ward off mild depression and poor sleep, and natural sunlight triggers the body to make vitamin D. This then helps the body to absorb calcium and phosphate for strong bones, teeth and muscles. 'We know that vitamin D is important for bone health during the menopause, but research shows that adequate levels of vitamin D may also reduce the risk of cancer – especially breast cancer – heart disease and type 2 diabetes, and slow down the ageing process,' says Dr Marilyn Glenville.

✢ **STAY SAFE** So, how much unprotected sun exposure is needed to make enough vitamin D? This depends on skin type, the time of day or year and where you are in the world, advises Cancer Research UK. For lighter skin tones this can be less than ten minutes a day; darker skins require more. Measure your daily UVA/UVB exposure with the wearable My Skin Track UV from La Roche Posay.

6 GARDEN GOODNESS

Over 60% of 45-65-year-olds enjoy gardening as a hobby, with studies suggesting that gardens become even more important to us as we get older. It's a source of physical activity, gives a sense of purpose and can stave off loneliness and negative emotions. 'The exercise, fresh air, eating wholesome, self-grown fresh foods, sharing those foods with others, caring for wildlife and growing plants, all support the body and mind so beneficially, agrees Horticultural therapist Deb Hoskin (**horticultural-therapy-trust.org**). 'No matter how deep someone's sadness or emotional trauma, garden projects create the opportunity to find inner calm – enough to live a better quality of life,' she says.

DEEP BREATH
Forest air boosts immunity by increasing white blood cells in the body.**

7 WOODLAND WELLNESS

The ancient Japanese practice of Shinrin-yoku translates as "forest bathing", and is the act of relaxing among trees. 'Spending time in a forest is like a mini-retreat and can work wonders for how we feel,' says Ellen Devine, wellbeing projects manager at Forestry England. 'Forests are a haven for escape and are especially restorative environments where we become more mindful and our mood settles. The senses are stimulated by subtle shifts in temperature or the scent of pine needles crushed underfoot, and this plays a role in reducing stress.'

FOREST BATHING FOR NOVICES

1 **Turn off devices** Don't let screens distract you from your relaxing, sensory experience.

2 **Take it slowly** Move through the forest at a pace that lets you see, smell, hear and feel your surroundings.

3 **Breathe deep** Take long breaths deep into the abdomen and exhale air for twice as long as you inhale to send a message to the body that it can relax.

✢ If in the UK, visit **forestryengland.uk** to find your nearest woodland.

The benefits of MASSAGE

Book in for a de-stressing massage when you can, or find out how to do it to yourself – or each other – at home. Here's why it really works

Used for thousands of years, massage therapy is still as popular as ever. And there's little wonder why, considering the positive physical effects it can have on the body. But the psychological benefits may also be effective long after your appointment.

'Massage improves joint mobility, decreasing or eliminating pain and muscular tension,' says Ruth McKinnon, head of massage at Ten Health & Fitness. 'Regular massages can also help mental wellbeing by improving sleep quality, and reducing anxiety and depression. It's even been shown to ease aggression and stress levels in those with dementia.'

It's also a good way to ensure you're taking time out. 'It provides valuable time for the mind to connect with the body and allows you to breathe,' says Ruth. 'That's why I'd recommend a massage every six weeks as essential maintenance.'

WHY MASSAGE RELIEVES PAIN

'Massage breaks the pain cycle by interrupting the nerve signal from the tissue to the brain – it's the same idea of rubbing your shin to soothe pain after you've knocked it on the bed frame,' says Ruth. 'And while the idea that massage can remove toxins or flush out lactic acid has been proven untrue, other benefits have emerged. A study showed that massaging a muscle post-workout increases the body's healing process and cell growth, and can even "turn off" genes associated with inflammation, a major contributor to pain.'

WHICH THERAPY WILL SUIT YOU?

Not sure which massage best suits you? Here are the most popular picks:

+ **SWEDISH** Good for muscular tension. Massage expert Beata Aleksandrowicz, founder of the Aleksandrowicz System, says, 'If there are no specific issues, it can simply relax and ease postural pains.'
Techniques used Long strokes, kneading, cupping and knuckling.

+ **THAI** 'It's an intensive, stretch-based massage providing meditative, rhythmical pressure, ideal for people who don't move enough,' says Beata.
Techniques used 'The therapist will use hand pressure and sequences of stretches to align joints and ligaments,' say Beata.

+ **HOT STONE** 'Smooth heated stones are used to relax muscles and allow for deeper pressure to be applied,' says John Holman, director of massage training at The Massage Company.
Techniques used Stones are usually used in a circular motion.

+ **DEEP TISSUE**
'This isn't so much about pressure, but about accessing the deeper layers of muscle tissue,' says Ruth.
Techniques used 'Therapists use their elbows while compression techniques are also common,' says Ruth.

WHERE TO GO
'While massage is an unregulated industry, anyone with a Level 5 qualification will have the skillset to assist with most musculoskeletal issues,' says Ruth.

+ **AROMATHERAPY**
'Massage creams and essential oils work on the olfactory system,' says John. 'They're inhaled and absorbed through skin, relieving stress.'
Techniques used Strokes are very light to allow the oil to penetrate.

+ **SPORTS**
'Not just for athletes, this can resolve soft tissue issues such as frozen shoulder or lower back pain, with a more targeted treatment,' says Ruth.
Techniques used 'Forearms, hands and elbows are used,' says Ruth.

+ **SHIATSU** 'It's used to release tension, but also to promote a sense of balance,' says Beata. 'Shiatsu focuses on the body's energy system, known as meridians.'
Techniques used 'Gentle pressure is applied in different places on the body,' says Beata.

+ **TRIGGER POINT**
'A trigger point is a catch-all name for points in muscles that, when pressed, can cause referred pain,' says Ruth.
Techniques used 'Usually there's some discomfort. Compression, breath work and, sometimes, stretching is used,' says Ruth.

WORDS: FAYE M SMITH. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

PRESS AWAY THE PAIN

'Reflexology uses nerve points on the feet that relate to different parts of the body,' says Beata. 'Applying pressure to these points indirectly release tension.' Here's how:

1 **TO COMBAT STRESS** Press and hold underneath the arches for one minute with your thumb.

2 **TO TREAT TIRED EYES** Apply a firm rotational movement into the crease under the tip of the first and second toes on both feet. Repeat three times on each.

3 **TO EASE A TIGHT NECK** With the thumb, work up and down in firm circular movements from the base of the big toe to the base of the ball of the foot. Finish by holding the big toe firmly, and gently pull and rotate three times clockwise and three times anticlockwise.

TRY AT HOME

Doing stretches or massaging yourself? Ruth's four main rules are: + Go slowly + Breathe + It should never be excruciating + Hold stretches for 20 seconds and breathe into them. + Giving someone a massage? 'Don't worry about doing damage,' says Ruth. 'Unless you have excellent grip strength, you're more likely to tire out your hands before injuring anyone.'

THE POWER OF

TOUCH

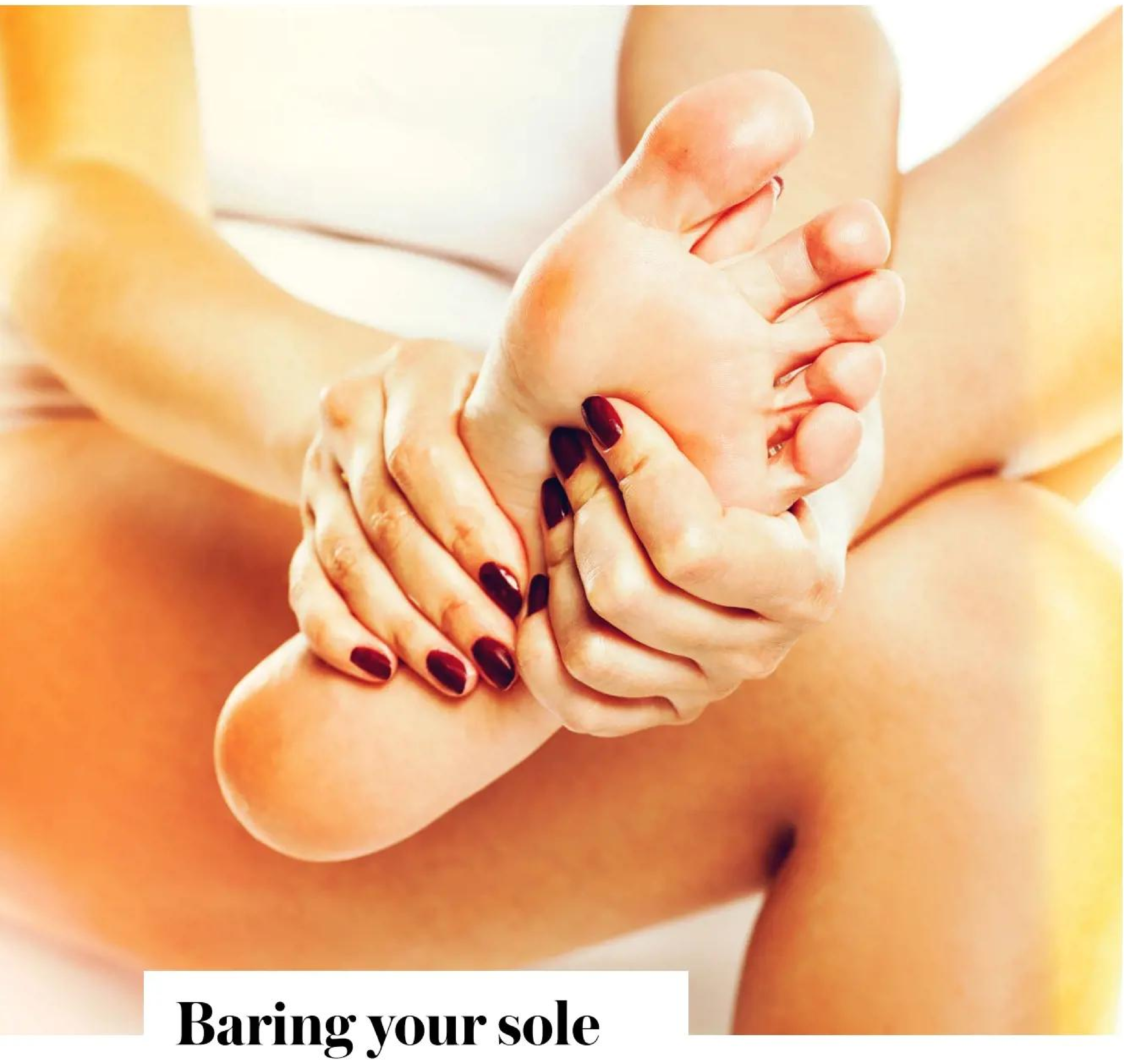
More than just a fancy foot massage, we explore the potential health benefits of the body's pressure points...

Reflexology is based on the theory that different areas on the feet, hands, face and ears correspond with parts of the body. 'The basic principle is that the two feet together as a whole represent an exact mini-map of the entire body, incorporating all of the body's systems,' says reflexologist Andrea Hurst (andreahurst.co.uk). By activating these points through pressure, you can treat multiple ailments within the body. This complementary therapy is steeped in history and has been practised for over 5,000 years, but it's still relevant to our hectic lifestyles today. 'Touching different areas helps aid relaxation, improves mood, releases tension, enhances sleep and generally helps improve wellbeing; therefore allowing us to cope better with the stresses that life can bring,' explains reflexologist Malini Sarkhel (livingmind.co.uk).

With a whole range of reflexology treatments available, we spoke with the experts on how to touch base with your body.

How does reflexology work?

Problem areas in the feet can feel "crunchy" to the therapist, indicating a problem in the corresponding organ or body part – by tapping in to the corresponding area from the hands, feet, ears or face, it can promote healing. 'As the reflex points are activated, a stimulus is sent via the nerve ending in the foot to the corresponding body part or system, and this natural stimulus has a profound affect on the nuclear cells and starts a resonance process,' explains Andrea. 'Reflexology can help release neurotransmitters, such as serotonin or adrenaline, that are deficient in-between nerve endings during depression,' says Malini. Many reflexology clients feel deeply relaxed with a sense of wellbeing after a treatment, but it's not uncommon to feel temporarily tired or emotional either. 'This is known as a "healing crisis" and is said to indicate that the body is beginning to eliminate toxins,' explains Sanae Baba, reflexologist at Cloud Twelve (cloudtwelve.co.uk).



Baring your sole

Feet are overlooked when they're busy carrying us around all day long, but they can speak volumes about us. 'In my own working practice, I detect elements of emotion related to past and future concerns affecting the individual,' says Andrea. 'Psychological or emotional issues in relation to past events can be seen on one foot, while current and future issues can be seen on the other,' she says. The right foot symbolises the past, while the left represents the future, so if you had an injury, it would show up initially on the right foot, before moving to the left foot as it heals. 'There can also be marks on the skin, discolouration, lines or texture differences that can apply to any organ, gland or system of the body being out of balance, such as the digestive, endocrine or skeletal system.'

Try it at home

TO COMBAT STRESS Target the adrenal glands. 'Deep underneath the arches of both feet there is a reflex point that corresponds to the adrenal glands. These activate our stress hormones when we are under pressure, but when the reflex point is worked accurately, it can help to dissipate these internal chemical reactions and bring the individual back to a state of complete calm,' says Andrea. Press and hold this point for one minute with your thumb.

TO TREAT TIRED EYES 'If your eyes are tired, apply a firm rotational movement into the crease under the tip of the first and second toes on both feet and repeat about three times on each,' says Andrea.

TO EASE A TIGHT NECK Target the inside length of your feet. 'With the thumb, work up and down in firm circular movements from the base of the big toe to the base of the ball of the foot,' says Andrea. 'Finish by holding the big toe in a firm and supporting way, and gently pull and rotate three times clockwise and three times anticlockwise.'

In your hands

The hands are another zone that contain key pressure points. 'Notice how you sometimes wring your hands or clench your fingers when you feel anxious? Well, it could just be that you're naturally self-soothing, and unwittingly using an ancient Japanese self-care technique called jin shin jyutsu,' says Kim Jones, author of *222 Ways to Trick Yourself to Sleep* (Piatkus). This acupressure involves holding the fingers to allow energy to flow freely and ease tension. And you're able to practise the techniques discreetly on the go.

Try it at home

FOR ACHES AND PAINS 'The hand valley point is in the firm skin between the thumb and index finger,' says Diana Drummond, nail technician and therapist at Still London. 'Applying firm touch on these pressure points may help alleviate toothache, migraines, shoulder and neck tension.'

FOR ANXIETY 'Place your thumb on the solar plexus reflex point,' says reflexologist Paula Bancroft. This is in the centre of the palm. 'Take three deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you breathe in, push gently into the reflex point and repeat on the other hand,' she says.

TO BALANCE EMOTIONS Try the Japanese "five-finger" exercise. 'The technique works on the belief that each of your fingers represents a different emotion,' says Kim. The thumb represents worry, the index finger is fear, the middle finger signifies anger, the ring finger is sadness and little finger self-esteem. Start by relaxing your fingers of one hand into a curve. Wrap the fingers of your other hand around the chosen finger on the relaxed hand. Hold for two minutes.

WORDS: ELEANOR VOUSDEN.
PHOTOGRAPHS: BACKUP-IMAGES.COM, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

All ears

A simple ear rub can help you to relax, but targeting specific touch points can help with multiple ailments too. Mona Dan, acupuncturist and founder of Vie Healing (**viehealing.com**), uses decorative gold-plated "ear seeds" on her clients to stimulate reflex points. 'Pressure points on the ear are stimulated by our 24k gold-plated magnetic ear seeds and then signals are sent to the reflex centres of the brain, which then stimulate the entire nervous system and body,' explains Mona. Similarly, many migraine sufferers choose to have piercings on a key reflex point (called the daith) to help lessen the symptoms. However, you can reap many benefits at home too with a simple touch.

Try it at home

FOR HORMONAL BALANCE
Hormones raging? Target the endocrine point, advises Mona. This area stimulates the pituitary gland (known as the "master gland" of the body), which directs and produces multiple hormonal processes. To find it, gently press and massage the bottommost dip of the inside ear.

FOR STRESS 'Another area to press is the "tranquilliser point", said to work like a shot of Valium at easing stress,' says Kim. Find it towards the bottom of the tragus (the part of your ear that meets the cheek).

TO ENCOURAGE SLEEP 'There's a useful acupressure point called anmian, which translates as "peaceful sleep",' says Katie Brindle, author of *Yang Sheng: The Chinese Art of Self Healing* (Hardie Grant Books). 'It's a very slight dent around 2cm behind the middle of your ear on the neck. Apply pressure with your finger and massage in a circular motion,' she says.

Face time

Sometimes, health and wellbeing concerns can be written all over your face. 'The chin represents the hormonal area, laughing lines represent the colon and digestive issues, and the nose bridge represents the spine,' says reflexologist Paolo Lai. And because the face is nearer to the brain, facial reflexology can be very impactful. 'The face's proximity to the brain and cranial nerves makes it very powerful in impacting on the body's systems,' says Triyoga reflexologist Tansy Lihou-Smith. 'There are certain conditions that facial reflexology can treat, such as migraines, bruxism (teeth grinding and jaw clenching), Bell's palsy and sinus conditions, such as sinusitis and hay fever.' Coincidently, it has a rejuvenating effect on the skin too, as the stimulation brings blood to the complexion.

Try it at home

FOR EYE STRAIN Spent all day staring at a screen? Try this. 'Slide your index finger up the bridge of the nose, resting the side of the finger gently on the tear duct of each eye and rest in place for three seconds and repeat three times,' says Tansy. Repeat on the other side.

FOR HAY FEVER To decongest your sinus areas on the face, use your index finger pads to rotate on points either side of your nostrils. Pinch the inner corner of your eyebrows with your thumb resting on the inside of the eye socket and index finger on the flat of the brow. Hold for three seconds and repeat three times.

FOR ACHING SHOULDERS
If you've spent your day hauling your bag around on your shoulders, treat the brow area, advises Paolo. 'Pinch the eyebrows, starting from the centre and moving out towards the temples. It really relaxes the neck and shoulder area,' he explains.

The CRYSTAL CRAZE

Most of us may have dismissed crystals as a bit too woo-woo – but they're having a moment. And as they say, if it works for you, try it!

Adele uses citrine to help combat stage fright. Victoria Beckham carries a black obsidian with her for protection. And Miranda Kerr keeps rose quartz next to her skincare products to infuse them with energy.

But while celebrities may swear by them, can crystals really have healing properties? And if so, how does that work on a practical level?

Stones are believed to work with chakras – your body's invisible energy centres – to help clear blockages in the "flow" of energy.

'Crystals emit an energy that can work on the nervous system,' explains crystal healer Kim Alexis. 'They have a vibrational frequency that affects human tissue. This means they can transform and shift the frequency in our bodies, influencing change.'

Whatever your take on the "positive energy" theory, there's no doubt that the earth's gemstones offer a kaleidoscope of natural colour and beauty that can lift your spirits.

They come in three main types. A large cut, polished crystal can cost thousands. A tumblestone – smaller but still polished and shiny – can be just a few pounds. For a real bargain, an uncut, unpolished raw stone is said to emit just the same energy as the shiny versions.

Healers recommend carrying them with you, either incorporated into jewellery or simply popped into your handbag. They also suggest using them as ornaments in a space where you need a little extra help – the bedroom to improve sleep, for example, or the living room to boost your mood.

Kim says that when it comes to choosing a crystal, people are often drawn to the ones they need. 'In a healing session I often get a client to pick from a range of different stones. It's usually very revealing.'

Here are ten crystals hailed for power to help heal specific problems – which one are you most drawn to?

TURQUOISE

BEST FOR aching joints

This hydrated phosphate of copper and aluminium is a dazzling blue-green colour. 'Lots of stones have a natural copper content, which can be helpful for joint health,' says Kim.

CITRINE

BEST FOR lack of energy

Golden-yellow quartz is linked to personal power, and helps you achieve your goals and dreams. It's said to carry the energy of the sun, so pop it on your windowsill to reflect sunlight and lift your mood.

LAPIS LAZULI

BEST FOR lack of concentration

A vibrant blue stone, it's often used in jewellery and features in the funeral mask of Eygpt's boy king, Tutankhamun. It can contain gold (pyrite) or white (calcite) coloured flecks. Wear it as a pendant when you need to concentrate.

WORDS: TANYA PEAREY.
PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

ROSE QUARTZ

BEST FOR headaches

The romantic pink “love” stone is a winner with celebs. It’s said to ease stress and improve circulation – great fixes for a tension headache. It’s also a good choice for your heart. Cleopatra is said to have used rose quartz for its beauty benefits, including clearing the complexion and preventing wrinkles.

AMETHYST

BEST FOR insomnia

The calming properties of this purple favourite are said to help beat sleep problems. Give the stone a soothing rub before bed and then pop it under your pillow for swift, undisturbed slumber.

CLEAR QUARTZ

BEST FOR all-round healing

One of the most popular and versatile stones, this “master healer” is said to cleanse, stimulate and restore you from all sorts of ailments. So if you’re looking for the mother of all healing crystals, this is your go-to.

AMBER

BEST FOR digestive upsets

‘Yellow helps the solar plexus, one of the most commonly blocked chakras,’ says Kim. ‘It can help with digestive-system disorders.’ Although often sold as a gem stone, amber is actually fossilised tree resin.

LITHIUM QUARTZ

BEST FOR low mood

‘Stones containing natural lithium can be helpful for symptoms of depression,’ says Kim. The mineral is used in psychiatric drugs as a mood stabiliser for mental health conditions such as depression and bipolar disorder.

BLACK TOURMALINE

BEST FOR anxiety

Tourmaline comes in an array of different colours but it’s the iron-rich black one you need for stress relief, as it’s purported to soak up dark energies. Try holding it in your hand when meditating to super-charge the effects.

RED JASPER

BEST FOR loss of libido

Go red to relight your fire! Red Jasper is hailed for its energy, strength and stamina – and could be the perfect pick-me-up for your bedside table.

SOOTHE *your senses*

Aromatherapy oils offer benefits for mind and body. Find out which fragrance you need…

There's no denying the power of scent. 'It has the ability to recall memories and emotions, meaning we can change how we are feeling simply by smelling a blend of oils,' says Christina Salcedas, global director of education at Aromatherapy Associates. It's not just about scents – aromatherapy can also work through absorption into your skin, So, which oils do you need? Consult our aromatherapy guide…

TO DE-STRESS

When thoughts are racing through your head, camomile helps to calm, while petitgrain clears the mind.

TO ENERGISE

Try zesty grapefruit to detox, rosemary to kick-start a sluggish circulation and juniper to release fluid retention.

TO BOOST IMMUNITY

Eucalyptus and pine essential oil help with seasonal allergies and can help decongest a blocked nose. Apply to the chest, behind the ears and a touch under the nose to help clear congestion.

TO MANAGE MOOD SWINGS

When your emotions are running riot, rose helps to uplift, while geranium balances hormones and frankincense focuses the mind.

HOW TO USE YOUR OILS

If you're using pure essential oils, never apply them directly on to the skin, as they are in their strongest form and can cause sensitivity. Dilute 12 drops of your essential in 30ml of a carrier oil (like olive, almond or jojoba oil).

TO SLEEP

For a deep slumber, try sedating vetivert and calming camomile.

TO UNWIND

Had a testing day? Lavender helps to ease stress-induced headaches, while petitgrain calms anxious minds.

TO SOOTHE ACHES & PAINS

Aching bodies will benefit from lavender. Rosemary also helps to stimulate circulation.

TO CHEER YOU UP

Help encourage a sunnier disposition by using ylang-ylang.

IN THE BATHROOM

For a relaxing soak or shower, follow Christina's steps:

1 Pre-bath, apply a capful of your essential oil blends onto your torso.

2 Cup your hands and bring to your face. Inhale through your nose and out through your mouth.

3 Step into your bath or shower to take in the fragrance.

AT WORK

Keep a mist on your desk for that 3pm slump. A little spritz will give you a boost and leave you feeling focused.

ON THE GO

Rollerballs are perfect for when you're out and about. 'Apply as you would a perfume.'

PHOTOGRAPHS ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

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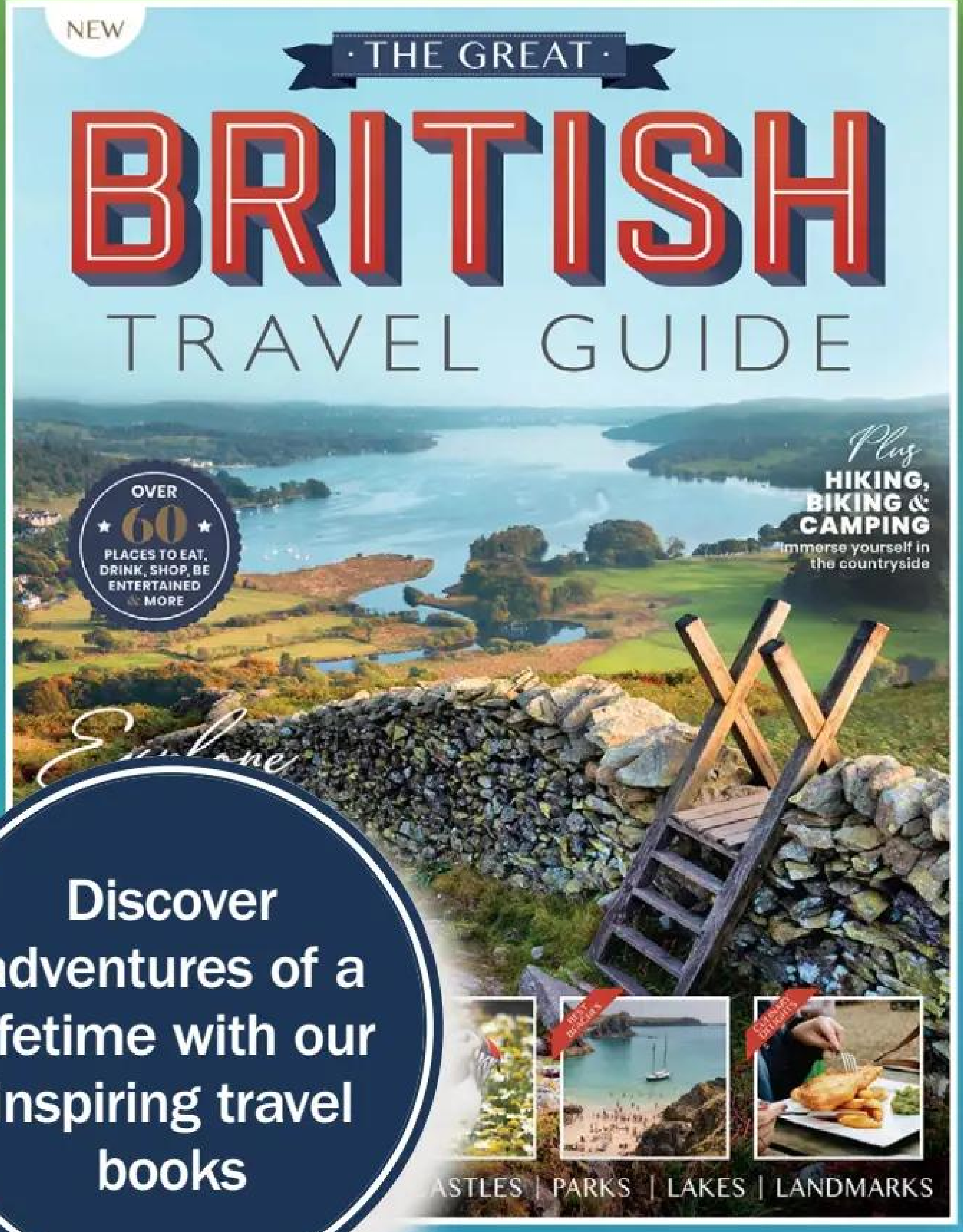
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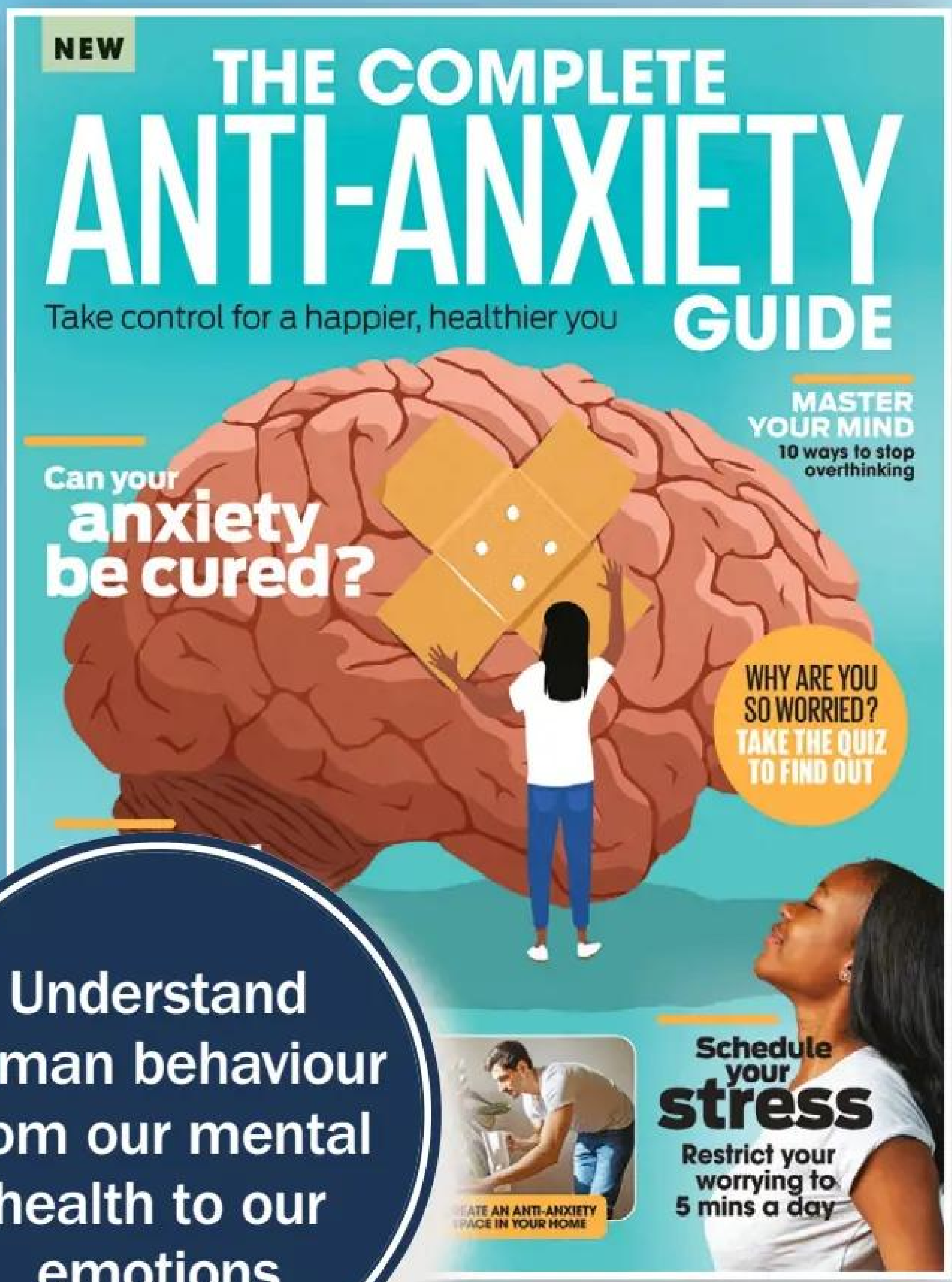
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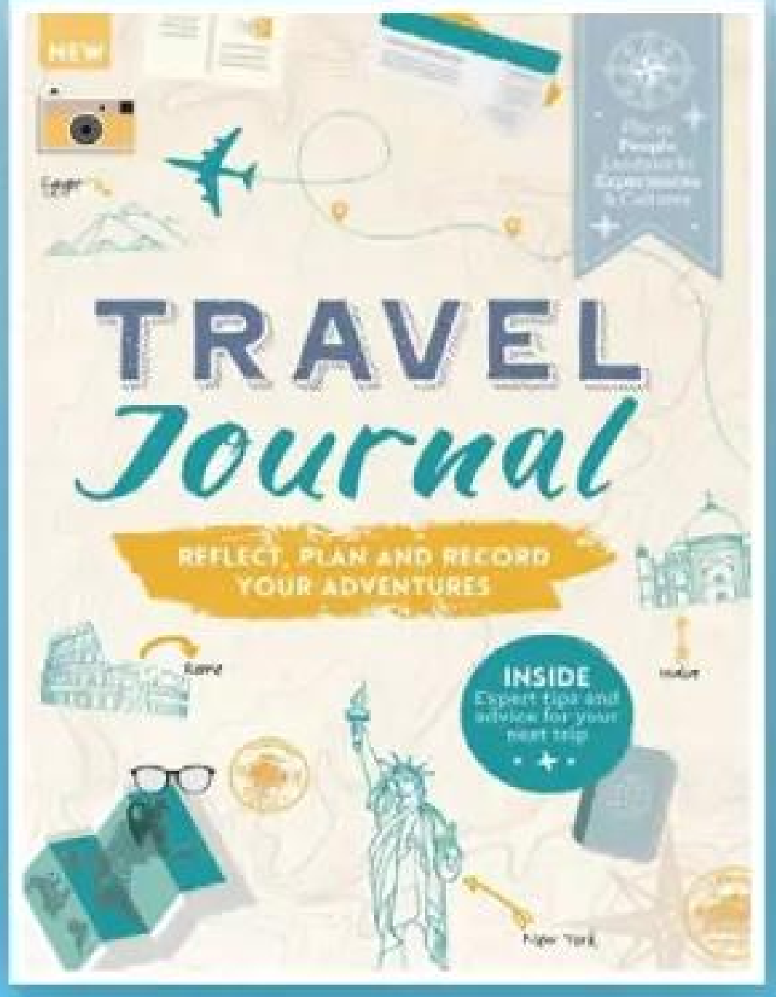
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